Class PZ3
Book W463
Copyright No. Whe

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.

2604
4578

Wheels Within Wheels

CAROLYN WELLS

92

By CAROLYN WELLS

Wheels Within Wheels
The Affair at Flower Acres
The Vanishing of Betty Varian
The Luminous Face
The Come Back
In the Onyx Lobby
The Man Who Fell Through the Earth
The Room with the Tassels
Faulkner's Folly
The Bride of a Moment
Doris of Dobb's Ferry
The Book of Humorous Verse
Such Nonsense! *An Anthology*

NEW YORK: GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

WHEELS WITHIN WHEELS

BY

CAROLYN WELLS

NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

PZ3
.W463
Whe

COPYRIGHT, 1923,
BY GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

WHEELS WITHIN WHEELS. II

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

OCT -1 '23

©CIA759229

IN ALL GOOD FRIENDSHIP
THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO

DOCTOR CHARLES GILMORE KERLEY

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	Howlands	11
II	The Thunderstorm	26
III	You Want My Father?	41
IV	A Curious Scar	55
V	The Clause in the Will	69
VI	The Girl in the Doorway	83
VII	"I Am Angela!"	97
VIII	The Mother Instinct	111
IX	The Coral Necklace	125
X	The Bit of Glass	139
XI	"I Can't Prove Anything!"	154
XII	The Harrison Story	168
XIII	Not Sure!	182
XIV	Conrad Remembers	196
XV	Utter Defeat	210
XVI	Swift's Ultimatum	224
XVII	The Chemist's Statement	238
XVIII	On Record	252

Wheels Within Wheels

WHEELS WITHIN WHEELS

CHAPTER I

Howlands

AMONG the most beautiful of the great country houses of America, and quite able to hold its own against many of the stately homes of England, was Howlands, the estate of Ralph Howland of Normandale, Connecticut, and of New York City.

The New England village was proud of its citizen, yet not over-appreciative, for your true New England village is aristocratic in and of itself and appraises with discernment the status of its inhabitants, rich and poor alike.

But the Howlands were favorites in the community, and had been for sixteen years, though few of the villagers had ever stepped foot across the threshold of the house. Perhaps it was sympathy that made the kindly feeling, perhaps pride of possession, but Normandale gloried in Howlands as in a treasure of its own.

On the outskirts of the little town yet within easy walking distance, the white house on its green hilltop could be seen from every West window in the village, and many glances from those windows were full of sympathy and pity even if tinged with curiosity or envy.

Of late years the summer stay of the Howlands had lengthened until it was nearly twice as long as their winter time in New York. And now it was October, and there was no sign of their return to the city.

Nor was it surprising that they should wish to linger. The hills were a glory of flame-like trees, the valley roads were bordered with yellow goldenrod and red sumac, and clouds of tiny purple asters were just beginning to appear. Color everywhere, —a blare of color, as if in flaunting defiance to the gray days and white winter that must soon follow.

Howlands was at its beautiful best. The big modern house was built on the truest and best colonial lines, its great semi-circular entrance portico upheld by four tall, splendid columns, white and dazzling in the sunlight. Green lawns rolled away from it and every side gave a view of picturesque landscape, flung across the hillsides, yet showing here and there little lakes, as clear and beautiful as only mountain lakes can be.

Yet the house breathed tragedy. Built sixteen years ago, the first season spent there had brought terrible grief to Ralph Howland and his wife and the place had remained closed for several seasons

thereafter. But change of scene, foreign travel, all efforts at diversion had failed to obliterate the sorrow, and of later years the Howlands had returned, not in gayety and mirth, but reverently, as to a shrine.

"I think, Mary," Howland said, as he watched the setting sun turn the blazing maples into deeper, softer tints, "that we must go down to town a little earlier this year. I've some big deals to put over, and then,—once things are settled,—we can come back as early as you like in the spring and never go away again unless you choose."

"Yes, Ralph," and Mary Howland, sitting on the balcony railing, looked indifferently at her husband.

Over forty, she had kept her youthful appearance, her youthful effects,—all but her youthful enthusiasms. Indifference was the keynote of her whole being.

She wore exquisite clothes, she had beautiful appointments in her house, the details of her home were charming, yet, without being exactly listless, she was uninterested in everything, even including her husband.

She loved him and there was strong sympathy and congeniality between the two, but any enthusiasm she might show was so palpably an effort, so obviously perfunctory, that Howland had ceased to expect or even want it, and she had ceased to display it.

They had occasional guests; they accepted and returned the village hospitalities, had house parties

and larger social functions, but though Mary Howland was a perfect hostess, she greeted none with a real welcome.

Nor was Howland much more cordial. He had men friends, there was mutual liking, but little true comradeship or joy of meeting.

Yet he was a fine man. A few years short of fifty, his appearance was distinguished, without being impressive. Tallish, thinnish, grayish, and sharpish-featured, he had been handsome and was still good-looking. His deep-set eyes were knowing and seemed to appraise instantly and truly anything they looked upon. Correct in manner and deportment, widely informed on most subjects, he seemed cultured without being aristocratic, and his assured poise gave the effect of being acquired rather than innate.

At present there were but few guests at the house.

One of these, Leonard Swift, strolled across the terrace, and sat himself down beside Mary on the balcony railing.

"Going down soon, are you?" he asked, overhearing. "Sorry,—it will cut my visit here short."

"Stay after we go, if you like, Len," Mary said; "I'll leave enough servants to keep you comfortable—"

"No, thanks. I love the place with people about, but not solitude up here. I'd get the creeps."

"What are you talking about?" said Howland, indignantly. "This is no bogey place,—the house isn't haunted."

"Awful lonesome, though, except with plenty of company."

"As you choose," said Mary indifferently.

Swift was Howland's cousin and the two men were not unlike. But Swift was twelve years younger, and black of hair and mustache, whereas the other showed a graying tendency.

Sharp, dark eyes both men had, and a quick, alert manner, that was the direct result of their nervous energy.

This had been modified in the case of the older man, but Leonard Swift was a live wire, and few things escaped or mystified his attention. He got on famously with Howland, but was never quite at ease with Mary. Indeed, few people were at ease with the sad-eyed, absent-minded woman.

But a cheerful element in the house just now was the presence of a light-hearted, youngish couple with rubber-ball temperaments and irrepressible dispositions.

Rob and Sally Peters were of that pleasant type who are bromidic enough to say they "never grew up," and yet not stupid enough to have it true.

Bob was stocky and red-faced, with an air of being determinedly well-groomed; for his intractable stiff hair and irrepressible fast-growing beard called for a strong will to keep them in order. Moreover, he couldn't make his clothes behave. His coat would wrinkle, his shirt bosoms would crumple, and his ties would fetch crooked at times. But his merry wide

smile and his kindly crinkling eye-corners betokened a generous viewpoint and a humorous soul.

Sally had the round infantile face that comes to some women in happy middle life.

She was complacent and self-satisfied, idly ready to listen to gossip, but too indolent to remember or repeat much of it. Her large light-blue eyes gathered up a great deal as they rolled tranquilly about, and her bedangled ears took in all details that interested her and but few that did not.

Her tastes ran to wearing semi-precious stones and drawing threads out of linen.

But owing to the insistence of her more athletically inclined husband, Sally trailed about the golf-links of the near-by country club day after day, unwilling but dutiful.

To the trio on the verandah they now appeared, tired but happy. Bob happy, because he always was. Sally happy, because Bob was.

"Good golf?" asked Howland, genially.

"Great!" Sally returned. "And the best of it is, it's over! I always say the best part of golf is the coming home after it."

"That's the best part of anything, isn't it?" asked Swift, but when he saw Mary's suddenly agonized face, and her sad shake of the head, he regretted his unfortunate question.

For Mary Howland's broken home and broken life were carefully avoided, even in indirect reference, by all who knew her.

"We met the foolish Conrad on the way home,"

Sally put in quickly, with a kindly intent to change the subject. "It's awful to laugh at the poor unfortunate chap, but he is so funny!"

"He is," and Mary smiled. "He comes up here pretty often, and yesterday he came to where I was sitting, on the terrace, and he looked for all the world as a squirrel does, when warily approaching."

"That's it, exactly," exclaimed Sally. "He has just that funny little roguish look of a squirrel. As if he'd come ahead if all's well, and scoot if it isn't."

"I don't think he's funny at all,—or even interesting," said Swift. "I can't bear to see him. He's —why, he's demented!"

"Oh, no, don't call it that," Howland said; "he's touched,—if you like, he's half-witted—"

"No, he isn't," Peters interrupted. "If he had a little more brains he'd be half-witted, but as is, he's a third-witted or even less."

"Well," and Howland spoke indulgently, "he's the Village Half-wit, so let it go at that. I'm told there's always a village half-wit—"

"Are there any village whole-wits,—that's what I want to know," said Bob Peters smiling.

"There weren't till you came," said Howland.

"Then now there are two," and Sally chuckled her happy little laugh.

"But you know, now,—that Conrad," and Bob Peters looked serious, "he has, I think, a homicidal mania—"

"Oh, no," Howland smiled. "You're way off. Conrad Stryker is half-witted, he is demented, if

you like, but he's no maniac. He hasn't a vicious hair in his head, he hasn't a criminal thought in his mind."

"On the contrary," and Mary Howland spoke with a kindly light in her eyes, "he's a gentle, affectionate nature. He's always letting things out."

"Secrets?" and Sally looked interested.

"No, not that," and Mary really smiled now, "but, I mean, if he sees a chance to free a small animal from a snare or trap, he lets it out. Why, they say, he opens his mother's mousetraps and lets the creatures free!"

"Oh, heavens! talk about something else," and Sally shuddered. "I'm not afraid of idiots, even those with homicidal mania, but I *am* of mice!"

"But he isn't an idiot," Howland persisted. "I've no especial interest in Conrad Stryker, but I do believe in justice. He is a simple-minded, harmless boy—"

"Boy!" broke in Leonard Swift, "he's thirty if he's a day!"

"I don't mean a boy in years, but in mentality. His is a case of arrested development, or whatever the doctors call it, and though his brains are weak and undeveloped, they are there and they are not distorted, as in the case of a real maniac."

"Mr. Howland," said a soft voice from the house door, and most of them looked up to see a vision of beauty framed in the doorway.

A vision of beauty is usually a hyperbolic term, but in this instance it was pretty nearly true.

A girl, with an expression half-apologetic, half-dictatorial, whose big gray eyes took in everybody present, but who only looked at Howland. She was not *petite,* and though not overly plump was well rounded and her flesh had a look of wholesome soundness.

And this wholesome soundness was very much in evidence, for Miss Mills, Howland's stenographer, wore her skirts very short, notwithstanding the news from Paris of descending hem lines. Also the collarless neck of her one-piece frock was as low as it could conveniently be, and her sleeves were chopped off in a straight line just below her rounded shoulders.

Her frock was without trimming, save for a binding or piping of a contrasting color, and a narrow belt defined her sound and wholesome waistline.

The short one-piece disclosed a bewildering length of silken hose, enclosing the sound and wholesome legs of Miss Mills, and it goes without saying that her shoes were impeccable.

The face, which one came to, after a rapturous and comprehensive glance at the rest of her wholesome soundness was oval and cream-colored, with tempestuous gray eyes that turned up at you appealingly and a mouth that quivered slightly if you were unsympathetic.

But few were unsympathetic with or to Miss Mills.

Swift had seen her before and so was not bowled

over by the vision, but it was a new one on the Peterses and they gasped.

"What is it?" asked Howland, shortly.

"The telephone, Mr. Howland."

"Necessary?"

"Yes, sir."

Without further word, Ralph Howland rose and went into the house, following in the wake of his stenographer.

"A museum piece," commented Peters, and Mary Howland smiled.

"Might as well be," she said, "for all the humanity or personality she possesses. Miss Mills is a beauty, but also she is a perfect worker. Ralph couldn't get along without her."

"I couldn't either," rhapsodized Peters, "that is, if I could get along with her."

"Get along with *you,*" and his wife smiled at him comfortably. "Come on, now, it's time to dress for dinner. Any guests, Mary?"

"A few. None of any especial interest. Wear some of your beaded things."

"I don't want to go just yet," begged Peters. "I've got something to talk over with Ralph."

"Talk it over with him after dinner," dictated his wife. "You'll be late if you wait now. Won't he, Mary?"

"Why, yes, I suppose so. Go on, Bob. You're an awfully slow dresser."

The Peterses departed and Swift came over and took a chair nearer his hostess.

"Mary," he said, "don't let Ralph go into that fool scheme with Peters. It's a wild cat game, and not only will Ralph lose a lot of money, but he may get himself into more serious trouble."

"What is it, Len? I don't know anything about it."

"That's why I'm telling you. Never mind details, it's called the Righto mine,—but it's all wrong. I know,—oh, Mary, you can't understand these things, but please do as I advise—"

"Just what are you advising?"

"Only that you persuade Ralph,—beg him, coax him, manage him any way you like,—but make him keep out of it."

"If it's wrong in any way, he'll keep out of it himself."

"But he doesn't know it's wrong,—and Peters is a cajoling sort. He'll wind Ralph round his finger—"

"Does Bob know it's wrong?"

"I'm not sure," and Swift looked perplexed. "I'd hate to think he did and yet I don't see how he can help it. But in either case, we want to keep Ralph out of it."

"Len," and his hostess looked at him amusedly, "what has come over you? Since when have you,—or have I, become Ralph's keeper? It's rather funny to think of our advising that man!"

"I know it, and yet, Mary, such times come to the best and cleverest of men. Just because Ralph is so wise and so experienced, just because he is so

sophisticated and so sure of himself, it makes it all the easier for him to accept the unproved word of a friend like Peters and go into the thing without investigation."

"Have you investigated it?"

"Enough to know that it's a fake,—a deliberate fraud,—and if Ralph even so much as touches it, he'll scorch his reputation badly!"

"Why don't you tell Ralph this yourself?"

"I did, but he thinks I know nothing of business matters. He thinks, compared to himself and Peters, I'm a babe in arms! Maybe I am, but I see farther through this millstone than they do! Mary, you must—"

"Must what?" and Howland reappeared, a sudden light in his eyes as he overheard Swift's words.

"Why, Ralph," and Mary turned to him, "Len wants me to urge you not to have anything to do with that mine proposition of—"

"No, that wasn't it!" and Howland looked quietly incredulous. "That wasn't the subject on which Swift was speaking to you so earnestly,—it couldn't have been—"

"But it was," reiterated Mary, "wasn't it, Len?"

"I don't understand you, Ralph," Swift spoke deliberately and scornfully. "And I disdain to answer your question. Your wife made an assertion. You should be ashamed to ask for its corroboration."

Howland smiled coldly.

"That high and mighty air doesn't suit you, Len.

But you're right. Mary, why do you discuss my business affairs with Leonard?"

"It wasn't a discussion, exactly," Mary Howland said wearily; "Len asked me to urge you—"

"I know, you said that before. But why bring up the subject at all, in my absence?"

"Oh, I don't know, Ralph!" Mary spoke almost pettishly. "We just referred to it by chance. Don't be disagreeable about it."

Howland was silent a moment, and then said, "All right, dear, I won't. But Leonard, you and I will talk over the matter this evening. Be in my library at eleven, will you?"

"Of course I will. Glad to. I tell you, Ralph—"

"Very well, but tell me then,—don't tell me now."

Howland went away again, and the two were rather silent.

"He's a strange guy," Swift said at last. "Doesn't he annoy you sometimes, Mary?"

"Nothing annoys me,—just as nothing rejoices me."

"No, I suppose not. But I do wish you'd try to rouse yourself from that attitude,—that somewhat determined pessimism of yours—"

"Pessimism! I rather think that if you—"

"Yes, I know,—I know. But, when everybody is trying to help you, when everybody is doing all that's possible for your good, for your happiness, I do think you might try—just try, you know, to do a little for yourself."

"You're right, Len,—and I know it. But,—oh, I can't! Sally tries to brighten me up and cheer me, until I nearly go frantic. But it doesn't do a bit of good,—I think it makes me worse."

"Oh, well, if you persist in that frame of mind, I dare say nothing can help you. But why, *why,* Mary, can't you make a big, splendid effort and conquer it all—"

"Conquer what?" her eyes blazed at him. "Memory?"

"No, no, of course not. But morbidity, melancholy, despair. Put up a fight—"

"Oh, hush, Len, I don't want to fight. You think, I suppose, you're saying something original, something novel. I've had that propaganda dinned into my ears by all sorts and conditions of people for sixteen years."

"Magee?"

"Yes, of course by Mr. Magee, and by the rector, and by the doctor and by Nurse Lane, and even by Miss Mills."

"Good Lord, what does she say to you?"

"Oh, she's no simpleton, you know. In fact, she gives me about the best advice of any one. Just to go outdoors a lot, and ride, and golf, and read, and mix with people,—just general good advice. I've even tried it,—but it does no good. To-night, I'm more than usually unstrung, because there's a thunderstorm coming up."

"A thunderstorm! In October?"

"Yes; such things aren't unknown. Anyway, there's one coming. You'll see."

"Rheumatic twinges?"

Mary smiled. "No, silly, not that. But nervous tremors and jumpy heart action."

CHAPTER II

The Thunderstorm

AS one entered the wide and beautiful hall of Howlands, on the right was the living-room and on the left was the library, in which the master of the house spent most of his time. Back of the library was a billiard room and back of that the large and formal drawing-room.

On the other side, that is, back of the living-room, were the dining-room and kitchens.

Simple of plan, the rooms were so large and spacious and so well proportioned that there was an effect of long vistas, and the great staircase which rose from the center of the hall and branched to either side was an architectural triumph in itself.

On the second floor, the bedrooms were ample and luxurious. The Howlands' own suite was over the living-room, while across the hall, above the library, were guest rooms now occupied by the Peterses.

Back of these was Leonard Swift's room, and behind that the pretty room of Miss Mills.

Next back of the Howlands' rooms was the room of Austin Magee, Ralph Howland's secretary, and back of this, the room of Nurse Lane, who though classed among the servants was a most important

member of the household,—indeed, almost a member of the family.

Magee was dressing for dinner and was thinking about the mining scheme in which Rob Peters was so determined to interest Howland.

The secretary had his employer's interests deeply at heart, and though he never had presumed to advise, he was carefully considering whether it was not his duty to do so in this case.

Austin Magee had what is called a round head, but it was also a long head and a level head.

Moreover, it was well set and well carried on his shoulders, for the man, though not specially well born, had a poise that a statesman might envy. His very walk across a room gave an impression of dignity and importance, yet he was in no way bumptious or assertive and was absolutely devoid of any appearance of self-consciousness.

His self-respect and self-reliance were plainly written on his strong, unhandsome face, and determination was, quite evidently, his besetting sin or his chief virtue, according to the object of his will.

His industry was tireless, his will power indomitable and his energy inexhaustible; and though at times a daredevil spirit was manifest, yet when Magee smiled he had the effect of a lovable scamp.

Though he had little originality or creative ability he was adaptable and quick-witted, and through these traits he had achieved much.

Indeed, so adaptable was he to influence or atmosphere that he was almost chameleonic. He took

color from his surroundings or his associations to such an extent that he seemed able to merge into any condition of life without effort, and also without detriment to his own imperturbable poise and his individual calm.

Yet he was saved from being a stone image by his sense of humor. A sudden radiant smile would light up his face at hearing a really happy quip or a quaint conceit, and his imagination was boundless when he gave it rein.

At thirty, Magee had achieved a position that pleased him. He was private secretary and general manager to Ralph Howland, a magnate of wide interests and various enterprises.

Or rather, Howland had been actively engaged in high finance, but now, nearly fifty, he was retiring from business life and was winding up and disposing of many matters with a view to a leisurely old age.

Though possessed of a city home, a forest camp and a seashore place, Ralph Howland liked best of all his New England country estate at Normandale and enjoyed most his summer months when spent there.

Yet the place breathed tragedy.

Built sixteen years ago, the first summer they lived there had brought terrible grief to Ralph and Mary Howland.

For in that first season, in the first happiness of their new home, an epidemic of sleeping sickness

had claimed their only child, the little five-year-old Angela.

Change of scene, foreign travel, amusements of all sorts, failed to divert the distracted mother or cheer the saddened father.

And though for many years the Normandale place remained closed and empty, of late, Mary Howland had found that, after all, she came nearer to a quiet content there than at any other of their homes.

Save for her apathy and indifference, Mary Howland was a most attractive woman. Talented, cultured, of quick perceptions, she was fitted to grace her position as chatelaine of the great house. But entertaining bored her, and much of the time the family were alone.

Leonard Swift was looked upon as one of themselves, and both Magee and Edith Mills were also part of the family circle.

Nurse Amy Lane had been the nurse of baby Angela, and had remained with Mary ever since the loss of the child. Solicitous for the health and comfort of her mistress, Lane had been a bit spoiled and was, of late, growing domineering and dictatorial, as is the way with old family servants.

But, on the whole, her presence was valuable, even necessary to Mary's well-being, and though disliked by the other servants, Lane was also feared and respected.

The sudden death of the child, during the excite-

ment and disaster of the fearful epidemic had been tragic in many ways.

There had been no funeral, and the tiny casket had been taken away from the house during a violent and terrifying thunderstorm.

This incident had so affected the nerves of the stricken mother, that ever since, she had been especially sensitive to weather conditions, and knew instinctively of the approach of the dreaded electric storms.

And now, even in October, she was right as to the coming of one.

Dressing for dinner, she continually and apprehensively glanced from her windows to watch the heavens.

Ralph Howland, through long experience, knew the futility of trying to soothe her fears, and the only thing to do was to have Nurse Lane in watchful readiness to care for her mistress when the storm broke.

But it held off and there were only distant rumblings and occasional faint flashes of lightning.

Mary, assisted by Etta, her maid, was getting into an evening gown of soft white that showed a bit of silver lace here and there.

A long sash end of silver ribbon hung at one side, and her silver slippers tapped impatiently as she was being hooked up.

"There now," admonished Lane, "don't you begin tapping your foot, Mrs. Howland. You'll get all feezed up if you don't hold on to yourself."

"She won't, if you'll only let her alone," Etta flashed back.

There was constant war between these two, for each scorned the other and each felt the other's presence unnecessary.

Etta, trim, smart and capable, looked disdainfully at Amy Lane, whose red face and tawny gray hair were as unattractive as her blunt speech was annoying.

Yet both were devoted to Mary, and this kept both in attendance and kept their mutual antagonism fairly well under subjection.

For Mary Howland permitted no bickering in her presence. When by themselves the two satellites might wage battles royal, but when with their mistress at least outward peace was enjoined.

Sometimes an irrepressible flaunt broke forth, but a mere glance from Mary Howland prevented the obvious retort.

So now, Nurse Lane gave Etta only an indignant look and held her tongue.

She was a gaunt, ungraceful woman, with prominent elbows and knees, and had a bearing like a grenadier.

Yet every gesture or motion showed capability and efficiency and though aggressive of manner and unprepossessing of face, she yet inspired confidence and gained from most a begrudged, unwilling admiration.

Her face, of the equine type, was framed in straying wisps of yellowish gray hair, and what are

known as scolding locks were always escaping from the invisible hairpins that visibly failed to confine them.

Her eyes were faded and colorless, with sandy brows and lashes, yet even this effect of weakness was offset by her large nose and firm, hard mouth. A martinet, a virago, she looked,—and was,—but toward her idolized mistress she was all gentleness and affection.

"There, there, dearie," she would say, and taking Mary in her arms would wipe her tearful eyes as she would those of a child.

"Going to put it over, Bob?" Sally Peters asked, as she powdered her little round nose, and then proceeded to powder her expanse of white chest preparatory to decking it with a complicated arrangement of aquamarines chained together by tiny metal links.

"Doubtful," responded her husband, retying an already overtied tie. "Yet it all depends. I'm to see him to-night, after the dinner is over and if he's in genial mood, I do think I can persuade him. Oh, I *must* persuade him,—or entice him,—or,—force him! Why, Sally, he's got to do it,—I tell you, he's *got* to! I *can't* lose this opportunity,—it means everything,—everything!"

"Of course it does, dear. He'll do it,—I'm sure. How much do you want him to put in—"

"That isn't it,—not entirely. I want him to back it,—to sanction it,—hang it all, why, I want him to buy it,—to buy the mine outright,—and then—"

"I believe after all, I'll wear my amethysts," and Sally held up another handful of glitter from her roomy jewel case. "What do you think, Bob?"

"I think you're heavenly in anything,—but why string the junk on, anyway? Why not a simple string of pearls, like Mary wears?"

"Sell the mine to Ralph, and buy me such a string, and you'll come out about even," said Sally, smiling at him.

"Oh, I don't mean real pearls—"

"And I don't want any other kind. Can I do anything in the business?"

"No; unless you drop a hint to Mary that—"

"That wouldn't do any good. A hint to Austin Magee might."

"Dubious. Sit next him at table, though, can't you, and then, if there's a good chance just remark on the surety of the scheme."

"Austin Magee is pretty hard-headed—"

"But not hard-hearted,—and,—you're a very pretty woman, my dear."

"To you, my best beloved,—but not to the world at large," and Sally smiled.

"Then the world is blind," and her husband spoke with a sincere conviction that delighted his wife.

But Austin Magee, carefully and skillfully tying his own tie at that moment, was about as far from being influenced by Sally Peters' charm as a granite obelisk would be.

His notion of the mining scheme was to let it alone, quietly, if possible,—insistently, if necessary.

Yet he feared that Howland would be drawn into it.

A' smaller deal Magee would have ignored, but this was enormous; it might wreck Howland's whole fortune. Something must be done, and at risk of incurring his employer's deep displeasure, Magee decided he must interfere.

Many times had Ralph Howland quoted to his secretary a favorite line, "Interference is the very hind hoof of the devil," and Magee had taken the hint and up to now had never given unasked advice or suggested any change of plan or procedure.

But now,—this fool mine! It would be too dreadful if a great man like Howland should fall for such a questionable enterprise! Yet, of late, Magee had realized that Ralph Howland's judgment was not quite what it had been. A few times and in minor matters, the secretary had been amazed at his superior's decisions.

That was why he feared for the result of the conference with Peters on the mine matter.

Peters was a persuasive talker, was a long-time friend of Howland's, was, though honest, so far as Magee knew, not of flawless impeccability in his business standards.

Moreover, there was that other matter opening up. That great matter, which, if it came about would revolutionize life at Howlands, and would need and want all the wealth Ralph Howland had amassed. No, that great fortune, that pile of riches

must not be even jeopardized just at this critical moment!

Shaking his head obstinately, Magee went downstairs and joined the others in the drawing-room.

Edith Mills, that invaluable member of the household, stood near Mary helping her receive and entertain the dinner guests.

Though only stenographer to Ralph Howland, Miss Mills also acted as his wife's social secretary, and she was both clever and useful in that capacity. Too, she was by way of being assistant hostess, and Mary had grown to depend on her for moral strength and support whenever she entertained.

In a small, plain frock of jade green chiffon, Miss Mills' pale blonde beauty showed at its best. Her cheeks were faintly pink, and her big gray eyes had a cordial look of greeting, though her manner was subordinate, and she in no way usurped any prominence.

As usual, her gown was low, short and scant. Untrimmed, and with no decoration of flowers or jewels, this left Miss Mills' wholesome soundness very much in evidence. But her air was unself-conscious, her manner simple and charming, and one would be over-meticulous to cavil at the details of her costume.

Magee made his way straight to the side of Edith Mills and, standing close, said in a low voice:

"Peters is dangerous. He's out for blood, and he's going to tackle the old man to-night."

"What can I do?" and though the girl's tone was a bit pert, she looked earnestly at Magee.

"Not much,—but you can do this. Sit next Peters at dinner and sound him. Just get all the information you can,—not about the mine, but general information of the man,—his habits, doings of late,—and—"

"I know," and the ash-blonde head nodded. "Go away now,—they'll notice you,—don't come near me again."

She turned away from him and resumed her pretty tasks of entertainment.

"How attractive that girl is," somebody remarked to Sally Peters. "Too attractive to be a man's secretary, I should say!"

"Oh, no," Sally explained, "she's a dear, and Mrs. Howland is devoted to her. Sometimes I wish she would adopt Edith and let her take the place of the daughter she lost."

"What an idea!" and the guest stared.

"Not at all a bad one," Sally returned; "Edith Mills is a fine girl, and a household favorite. She isn't secretary to Mr. Howland,—Mr. Magee is that,—but she is stenographer when needed, and she helps Mary socially at other times."

"She's a vamp,—that's what she is!" and the speaker glared at the short and narrow jade green chiffon.

"Oh, well, who isn't these days?" and Sally's merry laugh rang out. "I'd like to be,—if I were a bit more slender. Come, now, Mrs. Ogilvy, don't

be over-critical of youth and beauty. All young people nowadays are full of the vamp complex,—and to frown on it stamps one a bit old-fashioned."

"I'd rather be old-fashioned, then, than to have that flibbertigibbet in my house!"

"You're lucky not to have to have her, then. Oh, my heavens and earth!"

The sudden exclamation, not entirely inappropriate, was called forth by a terrific clap of thunder, with an almost simultaneous lightning flash that was evident even in the electric-lighted room.

Edith Mills, close at Mary's side, slipped an arm round the trembling woman, while Etta hovered in a doorway, and Nurse Lane's anxious face peeped over her shoulder.

But Mary Howland held herself well in hand and as the bolt was not repeated she summoned all her will power and led the way to the dining-room.

The serene smiles and gay banter of those at the table gave no evidence of the deep and perturbing thoughts beneath the urbane exterior of many.

Leonard Swift, himself of a reputation for repartee, made good at it, while his quick eyes and good ears took in all that was possible of anything said by his cousin or Rob Peters.

Magee watched everybody, without being noticed; but Edith Mills, who was possessed of truly abnormal hearing, listened adroitly to every one, and stored up several important bits of knowledge voiced by those at the far end of the board.

When at last the whole affair was over, Sally

Peters, in whose honor it had all been given, declared it had been a lovely party, but she was dead tired and was going straight to bed.

Without saying anything at all, Rob Peters made for the library,—where he was joined by Ralph Howland.

These two held confab, until Magee, in the billiard room next adjoining, overheard parts of the conversation, and unable to stand it longer, walked into the library.

"This is a private session, Mr. Magee," Peters said.

A quick glance at Howland made Austin Magee drop into a chair, with the easy remark, "All right, Mr. Peters, go ahead with it."

Instead of which, Rob Peters rose, and with a muttered word about coming back later, went angrily from the room.

The two men looked at each other.

"I've had news," said Magee, glancing about, warily. "I can't go into details to-night,—but there is a hope—"

"Lord, man, there's long been a hope,—can't you say more than that?"

"Not to-night, Mr. Howland; and, besides, I want to speak to you now about this mine matter."

Ralph Howland stared at his secretary as if he had voiced some terrible treason.

Then he said, coldly, "Magee, I have not asked you to do that."

"I know it, Mr. Howland, but—"

"You know it,—then you have nothing to say. I thought you must have mistakenly imagined I wished you to discuss it with me."

"I did not, nor do I wish to discuss it,—but I do want to warn you—"

"You warn me! Austin, have you taken leave of your senses? You never spoke like that before! I will overlook it this time,—but not a second!"

"There will be no second," and very quietly Magee rose and walked toward the door.

"Wait, Magee, a moment. What about the—the other matter?"

The secretary hesitated a moment, for he was angry beyond all bounds. But an instant of reflection made him turn and sit down again.

Drawing a memorandum book from his desk near-by, he began a low-toned conversation which was steadily and continuously carried on by the two men for a quarter of an hour or more.

Then Leonard Swift strolled in from the billiard room.

"I want to know about this," he said; "I overheard a part, and I think I should be told all."

"Tell him, Mr. Howland," and Magee got up suddenly, and this time left the room and went straight upstairs to his own room.

At the top of the stairs he met Rob Peters.

"Howland at leisure?" he asked; "I'd like a few words with him."

"Mr. Swift is with Mr. Howland," Magee returned, a trifle curtly, and passed on.

It was not long after this that the thunder, which had subsided to mere rumblings, began to grow louder. Another storm, doubtless, following the earlier disturbance.

Mary Howland, in kimono and slippers, came from her room, with intent of seeking her husband's presence, but Edith Mills, coming out quickly, intercepted her in the hall.

"Come into my room, dear," she said.

"No," said Mary, "I want Ralph," and she went on downstairs.

CHAPTER III

You Want My Father?

NEXT morning the sun rose clear, and the October landscape was as gorgeous and beautiful as if it had not been whipped and torn by the electric storm of the night before.

The few servants earliest on duty were about and one of them opened a back kitchen door in response to a knock thereon.

Conrad Stryker, the half-wit, stood there. He was a strange looking personage. A big, strong man of about thirty, physically well built, but with a pale, vacant face and staring blue eyes, that rolled from side to side as if worked by inanimate mechanism. His head was wide across the top,—anything going in at one ear and out at the other would have farther to travel than in most cases,—but it narrowed to a point at the chin,—kite-shaped rather than coffin-shaped. His large hands were nervously restless, his fingers incessantly moving, and he spoke earnestly but incoherently.

"Mr. Howland is dead," he said, turning round slowly, then suddenly turning back. "You want my father? I say—you want my father?"

"Go along home, Conrad," said Charles, who was the second man of the Howland house, and who was

a good-natured sort, and sorry for the idiot. "What are you doing out so early in the morning? Run home now and your granny will give you your breakfast."

"Yes,—but Mr. Howland is dead."

"No, he isn't. Good-by, Conrad, go home now."

"Wait, wait!" the fellow cried, as the door was slowly closed against him. "I tell you he is dead—dead. You must have my father,—you must! you *must!*"

Conrad's father was the village undertaker, a respected citizen of Normandale, who had carried on his business for many years. The tragedy of his idiot son had saddened his life, and the harmless half-wit was the protégé of the whole community.

For old John Stryker had performed his services for every family in the village, more than once in most of them, and his gentle demeanor and unobtrusive sympathy had endeared him to all.

Charles paused a moment, the door ajar, and looked at Conrad. He knew the poor unfortunate well, for he was often about the premises, and he saw that the vacant blue eyes were steady, and the nodding head positive.

"Why do you say that?" he asked, curiously. "Mr. Howland is in bed and probably asleep."

"No, no, no! he is not! he is *not!*" the voice rose to a shriek. "He is dead—in his room—his big room—by his desk—come, I will show you."

Conrad's strong hand grasped Charles' arm, and half unwillingly, half fearful, he let himself be led

along by the idiot, who strode with him around the house to the great front verandah.

Up the steps they went, and, pausing at the open window, Conrad pointed through it.

Trembling, Charles looked in and saw his master, his head fallen sideways on his desk, his body relaxed and arms hanging down. He might be asleep in that position, but he surely had all the effect of a lifeless man.

Charles turned to stare at Conrad.

"Dead!" the half-wit crooned softly. "All dead, —dead—dead—" he chanted the word.

"Oh, shut up!" cried Charles, his nerves giving way. "Stop that infernal noise! What does it mean? I daren't go in—"

He turned and ran back down the steps and around to the kitchens again.

Rushing in, he went at once to find his superior, Martin the butler.

That important personage was just coming down the servants' stairway.

"Mr. Howland is in the library—" Charles began, and his wild-eyed, agonized expression startled even the calm of the imperturbable Martin.

"Well?" he asked. "What of it?"

"Come!" and beckoning the butler, Charles went toward the front hall.

The door of the library was closed, and to the amazement of Martin his subordinate unceremoniously opened it.

Then both men stood still in horror. Viewed

from that side, it was plain to be seen that Ralph Howland was indeed dead.

No second glance at the staring eyes, the white face, the rigid position, was necessary to drive home the truth.

And beyond the huddled form, outside the open front window, they saw the idiot boy, his mouth open and his round blue eyes gazing at them.

"You want my father?" he repeated.

"No!" cried Charles, in utter exasperation at his persistence. "When we do, we'll send for him. You go home."

"Wait a minute," said Martin, trying to pull himself together. "What are you doing here, Conrad?"

"He was wandering about when I came down," said Charles. "Send him home. What must we do, Martin?"

"Go for Mr. Magee," the butler ordered. "Don't tell any one else, until he says so. He's in charge—"

"Mr. Swift—" Charles suggested.

"No; get Mr. Magee first."

So Charles went quickly upstairs and tapped at the secretary's door.

"Well?" was the response, as Magee opened the door.

"Please come down to the library, sir," Charles said; "don't wait to dress,—put on a bathrobe—"

But quick-witted Austin Magee had already sensed an emergency and had swiftly got himself into most of his clothes.

Collar and tie were omitted, but as he was on his way down the stair he was pulling on his coat.

He had wasted no time on questions and reached the library door to see the butler bending over the body of his dead master.

"Don't touch him, Martin," he cried sharply. "What has happened?"

"He's dead, sir," said Martin, solemnly.

"Dead, dead," chanted Conrad, from the window. "You want my father?"

"He can't be dead!" said Magee, closely scanning the white face; and then, as he felt of the still wrist and the cold flesh, he added, "but he is!"

"Yes, sir," and Martin bowed his head.

For a moment Magee stood staring,—unseeing,—but thinking quickly.

Then he said, "Charles, go and get Mr. Swift. Tell him to hurry down. And Martin, you go about your work. Serve breakfast as usual. You must tell the other servants, I suppose, but don't allow any noisy excitement or hysterics. We have Mrs. Howland to consider first of all. Don't let her be told of this by a servant."

"Very good, sir," and Martin disappeared.

Alone with the lifeless body of his employer, Magee gave it no glance, but with swift, efficient movements, went straight to the safe, opened it, and rapidly selecting various papers and bundles of papers, transferred them to his own desk, which he closed and locked.

He stood in thought a moment, then, listening for

footsteps on the stairs and hearing none, he opened a drawer in Ralph Howland's desk. The position of the dead body made this difficult, but Magee managed it, and extracting more papers therefrom, put those also in his own desk and again locked it.

When Swift entered, the secretary stood, with folded arms, gazing at his one-time employer.

Leonard Swift, with tousled hair, dressing-gown over his pajamas and shuffling bath slippers, stopped short as he entered the room.

"My God!" he exclaimed, "he—he isn't—"

"Yes, he's dead," and Magee stood without moving.

"What—what from? Heart disease?"

"How do I know? He had no heart disease that I ever heard of."

"But what else could it be? He wasn't—wasn't—" Swift's teeth chattered and he could not bring out the dreaded word.

"Murdered," said Magee, coldly. "I don't see any sign of it, but I think we must call a doctor at once."

"Yes,—yes,—of course. You do it, will you, Magee? I—I must dress."

"Yes,—but, wait a minute, Swift. I'll call the doctor,—and he'll know what to do,—but what about Mrs. Howland? Who will tell her?"

Swift considered.

"I can't," he said, at last. "Oh, I couldn't do it. Get,—why, get Mrs. Peters to tell her. It's a woman's job, seems to me."

"Either Mrs. Peters or Nurse Lane," Magee said; "both of them, I should say. Go on up, Swift, and dress yourself. I'll send somebody for Amy Lane."

There was time enough to move slowly, Magee reflected.

Since Mary Howland didn't already know of the tragedy, it was probable that she would not be anxious for an hour or so, at least.

If awake, doubtless she thought her husband in his own room; if asleep, she was secure for the moment.

So Magee sent a message to Nurse Lane to come to him in the living-room as soon as she could do so.

Then he closed the library windows, and going out, closed the door.

To Conrad, still on the verandah, he issued curt orders to go home, which the half-wit obeyed no more than he had his similar previous ones.

"Has something happened?" asked Amy Lane, as, fully dressed and composed of manner, she came to Magee.

"Yes; Mr. Howland is dead."

"Oh, my poor lamb!" and Lane's thoughts flew to her mistress. "Oh, how can I tell her? What killed him?"

The instant acceptance of the situation was characteristic of Lane; she had concern only for her beloved mistress, and was already planning how best to break the news.

"I don't know. I'm about to call Doctor Avery.

He died in the night,—he was still down in the library—"

"Bless us, Mr. Magee, was he murdered?"

"Not that I know of—" Magee looked at her thoughtfully. "Now, Nurse, it's an awful situation, in any case. I'm going to depend on you to do your part, which is, of course, looking after Mrs. Howland. But, also, I want you to keep the servants in order. The women, particularly. I don't want a lot of talk and gossip and curious speculation. We only know the one fact,—Mr. Howland is dead. For further information we must wait. Understand?"

"I understand, sir," and Lane looked at him gravely. "Am I to tell nobody?"

"You are to tell Mrs. Peters. Go to her at once, tell her and she will tell her husband. Then, when you tell Mrs. Howland, you may ask Mrs. Peters to be present, or not, as you think wisest. Tell me, Lane, what do you think? Will Mrs. Howland be hysterical, or will she take it quietly?"

"Hard to say. She's more likely to be struck dumb,—yet, again, she may go into violent hysterics. You know, there's been nothing like this since little Angela died."

"I know. That nearly unseated her reason,—this may entirely do so. Do you want me to be present, —or, or Mr. Swift?"

"No, not at first. I can do best alone. Of course, you'll see her after."

Lane stalked from the room, but her usual militant bearing was gone. She was trembling, almost limp, yet with a realization of her duty, and a determination to do it as best she might.

After calling Doctor Avery on the telephone, Magee remained in the hall, and shortly the Peterses joined him there.

Sally's round face, devoid of its usual smiles, and Peters' inquiring expression put the question they did not need to voice.

"Yes," Magee said, briefly, "Mr. Howland is dead. He must have died in the night,—while seated at his desk."

"But how—what—" Rob Peters began.

"I don't know, Mr. Peters," and the secretary looked at him blankly; "it may have been a stroke or heart disease—"

"But Ralph was a well man," Peters asserted; he had no heart trouble,—he's too young for a stroke—"

"What about Mary?" asked Mrs. Peters. "Does she know?"

"I've told Nurse Lane to use her discretion about telling her," Magee returned. "Perhaps you'd better go up and see her,—I mean, see Lane—"

"I will," and Sally Peters went quickly upstairs.

"What does it mean?" Peters asked of Magee. "Any chance of—of foul play?"

"I don't know," Magee replied, in his calm, noncommittal way. "Go in and look at him yourself."

"No,—I think I won't,—" and Peters shuddered as he glanced toward the closed door of the library. "There's no sign—of—of violence?"

"None that I saw, but of course I made no examination."

"Why not? Why don't you—"

"I think it wiser not to, Mr. Peters. Mr. Howland is positively dead, of that I am sure, so I have sent for Doctor Avery, and he will make the investigation."

Peters looked curiously at the imperturbable secretary and was about to reply, when a hasty step was heard on the stairs and Miss Mills appeared.

She was dressed in white, and the one-piece slip of serge was both short and scant. Her low-cut neckline and short sleeves, her white silk stockings and suede pumps gave her an air of distinction as her graceful, dainty figure hurried toward them.

Always pale, her face was ghastly as she cried, "Oh, Mr. Magee, is it true—is it *true?*"

"Yes, Miss Mills," and Magee looked at her coldly; "it is quite true. Mr. Howland is dead."

"Where is he? I want to see him!" Her gray eyes filled with tears and her red lips quivered.

"Go into the library if you wish," Magee said, a little more gently. "Of course, do not—do not touch him."

"No," and without another word, Edith Mills went into the library and closed the door behind her.

"Oh, I don't know about that!" Rob Peters said,

staring at the closed door. "There may be—evidence, you know,—clews—"

"You imply crime, Mr. Peters." Magee's tone was accusing.

"Well,—well—" Peters stammered, "you never can tell, you know."

"But I can't think Miss Mills could do anything wrong. She was devoted to Mr. Howland, she is very emotional,—she—"

A suppressed shriek sounded from the library, and Miss Mills rushed hastily out.

"Oh!" she cried, "oh, that awful boy,—that horrid idiot! Make him go away!"

Magee rose quickly and entered the library.

Conrad was outside, his face pressed against the glass of the window.

"I'll settle him," said Peters, who had followed Magee.

Out through the front door Peters strode.

"Conrad, you must go home at once,—right now,—and stay there! Go,—go along."

By way of emphasis, Peters took hold of his arm and started the idiot toward the gate. "Go on, now!"

Reluctant but obedient, Conrad went, muttering as he slowly shuffled his way through the fallen autumn leaves.

An entering motor car passed him, and in a moment Doctor Avery entered the house.

With the briefest nod of greeting, Austin Magee conducted the physician at once to the library.

Also in silence, Doctor Avery approached the still figure and began his examination.

Magee stood by with folded arms; Miss Mills, coming near him, watched the doctor, while her long white fingers twisted nervously.

Rob Peters came to the doorway, from which he was hastily pushed aside as Leonard Swift came through.

"What is it, doctor?" he asked, loudly. "What killed him? Was it a stroke?"

Swift drew near and, ignoring the others, took upon himself the mantle of authority then and there.

"Make your report to me," he said, importantly; "now Ralph is gone, I'm at the helm. What was it, doctor?"

"I confess I'm puzzled," and Doctor Avery turned a perplexed face toward his questioner. "I know Ralph Howland's physical condition as well as I know my own, and he had no tendency toward heart disease, no trouble of that sort whatever. He had no affection of any sort that could have brought about this sudden death."

"Then was he—was he—"

It was Edith Mills who spoke, her eyes big with terror, her face agonized and her whole body quivering with nervous fear or excitement.

"I don't know—" Again the doctor gave that baffled look. "There is no evidence of a crime,—" He scrutinized again the dead face,—he bent closer and sniffed at the lips, he peered into the open,

staring eyes. "It is the most mysterious thing I ever saw! I must call in Mason."

"Shall I do it?" asked Magee, helpfully.

"Yes. Ring up Doctor Mason, the county medical examiner. Get him to come at once,—and—but he'll know what to do. Tell him I can't make out what killed Howland."

Still pondering, the doctor again examined the body, looked about the desk, and glanced over the room.

"Where's the bird?" he asked, suddenly.

The others followed his eyes to the gilded cage of Ralph Howland's pet canary. The door was slightly open and the cage empty.

"Queer!" Leonard Swift said, "that bird was the apple of Ralph's eye. Who could have left the cage unfastened?"

"What about Mary?" asked Doctor Avery, uninterested further in the bird. "Does she know?"

"Not yet," Swift told him. "I just saw Nurse Lane, and she said she should wait until Mary had eaten her breakfast before she told her."

"Good," Avery commented. "Then, let us have breakfast, I've had none, and we could all do with a cup of coffee."

It was Mrs. Howland's custom to breakfast in her room, so the others went to the dining-room where the table was in readiness.

"Guess I'd better tell Mary myself," said Doctor Avery, after he had made a hearty meal. "No telling what she'll do."

He lumbered up the stairs, he was no longer a young man, and he had cared for Mary Howland's physical well-being for many years, and without ceremony he tapped at the door of her boudoir.

"Why, Doctor Avery, what are you doing here?" she exclaimed, as Nurse Lane let him in.

"How are you this morning?" and the doctor looked at her intently.

"All right," she returned, brightly, but the eyes that looked up at him, across her untouched breakfast tray were moving restlessly about, and her wandering gaze was unintelligent and uncertain.

"She won't eat," complained Lane; "she won't touch her coffee."

"Never mind, put it away for the present," and the doctor sat down beside his patient and took her hand.

"Mary," he said, watching her closely, "where is Ralph?"

"Where is Ralph?" she repeated, "yes,—that's so; where *is* Ralph?"

"Do you know?"

"Do I know? No,—I don't know—do you know? Does anybody know?"

"Mary," he spoke with a quiet emphasis, "Ralph is dead."

"Yes," she said, "I know that. Have you seen the will?"

CHAPTER IV

A Curious Scar

DOCTOR AVERY lumbered downstairs again.

"Mrs. Howland's mind is very much affected," he said, as he joined the group in the living-room. "After the death of her child, it hovered in the balance, but for years she has been practically all right. This new tragedy, however, has, I fear, unhinged it, and she doesn't know what she is talking about."

"How did she learn of her husband's death?" asked Sally Peters, curiously.

"I told her," replied the doctor, a little shortly, and not adding that Mary had said she already knew it. "Better leave her alone for the present; Lane is looking after her."

"But how does she seem? Is she quiet,—or violent?" Sally persisted.

"Perfectly quiet. Melancholy,—not really alive to the situation at all. I'll watch her carefully, but she must see no one but the nurse just now."

Then Mason, the county physician, arrived. He had come from the county-seat, five miles distant, and was eager to hear the details of his strange summons.

The two doctors went to the library, and Avery awaited with interest the opinion of his colleague.

But Mason was as puzzled as himself, and the two men stared at one another and at the face of the dead man.

"The countenance, slightly cyanosed as it is, hints at poisoning—hydrocyanic,—for choice. But there's positively no odor on the lips or on the body. It's not a plausible explanation. Yet there's no real symptom of heart failure,—it certainly is not a stroke of any sort,—I think we must report to the police."

"Oh,—the publicity—the—do you mean murder, Mason?"

"That's what it looks like to me,—though I can't fathom the means. Yet an autopsy may show the introduction of a long, fine, pointed instrument, hat-pin, say, or very slender dagger."

"But in that case, there would be—"

"Oh, I know, Avery. I only say that I cannot learn the cause of this death without an autopsy. And I prefer to report to the police first."

"Better, of course. Shall I call the Station at Bannerton?"

For the peaceful little village of Normandale had never had enough wrongdoing in its community to support a local police force.

Mason agreed and then he began to look about the room.

"Know any of the details?" he asked. "Howland likely to have been killed?"

"Good Lord, no!" Avery broke out. "There never was a man less likely. And I don't for a minute believe he was. We'll prove a natural death."

"Hope so, I'm sure, as you're so anxious. How's his wife?"

"Bad,—very bad. Always nervous and easily upset, this thing has just about finished her mentality."

"Off her head?"

"Practically. But quiet and amenable,—so far."

Doctor Avery did not at all like the county physician. Mason was a much younger man than himself and had the flippant manner and cocksure air of the newer generation. He eyed the dead man and Doctor Avery alternately.

"Don't keep anything back, please," he said.

Avery started. "I'm not," he returned, angrily. "Why should I?"

"Don't know, I'm sure, but you look uncommonly like a man with a doubt of some sort."

"I've a good many doubts, but the principal one is whether this death is a natural one, or—"

"A suicide?"

"No! not that! That's impossible. Ralph Howland had no motive for suicide, but if he had, he'd never be coward enough to do that,—nor would be so cruelly harm his wife."

"Maybe not—maybe not. By the way, what's this?"

Mason drew the other's attention to a very small cut or scratch on the dead man's cheek.

"Can't see any importance in it. Probably cut himself while shaving."

"Not just the right place for that. And, besides, it's too fresh a scar. That cut occurred not more than a minute or two before the man died."

"At any rate, it couldn't have caused his death,—if that's what you're getting at."

"It's a queer cut,—like a little circle."

Doctor Avery scrutinized the wound.

"The merest scratch," he said; "might have done it with his finger nail."

"True," agreed Mason.

Then Chief Weldon and two of his men made a somewhat dramatic entry. A crime of any sort was of such infrequent occurrence in the neighborhood that it was met with an awed excitement not wholly unpleasant.

"A murder? A dastardly murder?" Weldon inquired, in a stagey whisper.

"We don't know that," said Doctor Avery, testily, "but the case must be looked into."

"Yes, yes, indeed," and Weldon rubbed his hands in anticipation of conducting the looking-into process.

But by noon, though the autopsy had been completed, the Chief of Police was as far from certain of having a criminal case on his hands as he had been at first.

In the living-room and in the presence of the

assembled household he heard the report of the doctors.

Although Mason was in charge, Avery was a physician of far wider experience, and the two had not quite come to an agreement.

Both declared that there was absolutely no condition or symptom of the body incompatible with a simple, natural death, but neither was there any hint or indication as to the cause of death.

The stomach contained no trace of poison, nor was there any on the lips or tongue, nor had any been introduced by injection into a vein.

Moreover, there was no stab wound or shot, there was no bruise or abrasion of the skin, with the exception of the tiny scratch on the cheek; and that, both doctors averred, was not infected or serious and could not by any possibility have brought death about. Indeed, they agreed that it had doubtless come as the man's head dropped forward on the desk.

"But," said Doctor Mason, "I submit this opinion. I assert that when the autopsy was begun, the initial incision in the chest brought to my nostrils a sudden, fleeting whiff of the odor of prussic acid. This Doctor Avery did not notice, and he thinks I am mistaken about it."

"I do not say Doctor Mason is mistaken, I merely say I noticed no such odor," Avery said, quietly.

"Is it essential?" asked Weldon, wonderingly.

"No," said Avery, quickly, but Mason said, "Pardon me, I hold that it is. If such an odor was

present, it indicates poisoning,—if not, we have no reason to suspect poisoning."

"Then look for some other cause," said Doctor Avery, curtly, "for I am sure that odor existed only in my learned colleague's imagination."

Seeing there was more or less of a personal issue just here, Weldon asked further questions as to other possible explanations of Ralph Howland's death.

And the two doctors were at one in their positive assurance that there was no symptom, no hint as to the manner in which death came.

"It's a strange thing," Rob Peters burst forth, "that two experienced physicians, after an autopsy, can't learn the cause of a death!"

"It is a strange thing," agreed Doctor Mason; "I don't think I've ever seen such a case before."

"However," and Austin Magee spoke with very evident relief, "I think we can dismiss the idea of crime and consider the death a natural one, since there is no evidence otherwise."

"I agree to that," said Leonard Swift, and he too seemed relieved.

Indeed they all were, for while death is bad enough, it is far worse to feel that it was brought about by human agency.

Sally Peters' face lost its look of horror and was merely sad; Miss Mills stopped crying and tried to still her quivering mouth.

Rob Peters was frankly relieved and said so.

But Chief Weldon said, "Not so fast,—not so fast. Negative evidence is far from conclusive.

Justice demands its own, and until we can prove the death a natural one, we must look further,—even if we fare worse."

Magee cast a quick look at the chief, and concluded that he was rather anxious than otherwise that the matter should turn out to be a crime. But he did Weldon injustice there. The man was honestly trying to do his duty, and he felt that this was too soon to turn down the case as finished.

"There are other means of discovery," Weldon went on. "Investigation may prove a willful crime, even if the results are not at first discovered by the physicians. At any rate it will do no harm for me to make inquiry as to the details of the matter. Will some one tell me the history of the case,—if I may call it that,—in a few words."

"I will tell you," began Leonard Swift. "As my cousin's heir and successor to this property and to most of his business affairs, it devolves on me to make the statement."

"You are his heir?" asked Weldon. "Has his will been read?"

"No; but I am familiar with its provisions and I know I am the principal heir of Ralph Howland's estate."

"But he left a wife?" said Weldon, wondering.

"She is amply provided for, but she is incapable of taking charge of the business matters and the property estates, which have been left to me. My late cousin knew that I would carry on his business interests and attend to his various enterprises, which,

of course, a woman could not do. However, that's neither here nor there. You can read the will for yourself."

Swift had risen, and it was with rather a benignant air that he looked about at the listening group. He seemed to have taken up the reins of government at once, and his appropriation of Ralph Howland's estate was, apparently, to him a matter of course.

"Where is the will?" asked Weldon. "Let us read it now."

But the detective who had come with the chief, one O'Brien, was anxious to learn further details of the events of the night before, and said so.

"Ask some questions, if you like," Weldon directed, a little relieved at the idea of assistance in his unfamiliar task.

"Who saw Mr. Howland last?" O'Brien began briskly, and his sharp eyes darted round the room.

"That's hard to say," Rob Peters remarked. "I had an interview with Mr. Howland in his study about eleven o'clock, and when I left him Mr. Magee was with him."

"I stayed half an hour or so, and when I left him Mr. Swift was with him," the secretary narrated, and there seemed a tinge of satisfaction in his voice at thus shifting the responsibility.

"Yes, I had a talk with him," Swift agreed, "and I left him about midnight. He said he should sit up an hour longer, as he was not sleepy, and he had some matters to think over."

"He seemed well?" the detective asked.

"Perfectly," returned Swift; "never better. We discussed his will, in fact, he showed it to me, and when I said I hoped it would be many a long year before that document was called into use, he laughed and said he was sure it would."

"Where is the document?"

"In the right-hand upper drawer of his filing cabinet."

"Not in a safe?"

"I only know where he put it last night,—after we had talked it over."

"All right. Now no one else present saw Mr. Howland after the hour of midnight?"

There was no response for a moment, then Miss Mills said:

"Mrs. Howland came downstairs after that."

"How do you know?"

"I heard her."

"From your own room?"

"Yes; I have especially good hearing, and I always hear any movements in the house after it is still for the night."

"Where is your room, Miss Mills?"

"On the same side of the house as the library, but back,—at the rear."

"And from there you can hear people going up or down the carpeted staircase!"

"Miss Mills has really abnormal hearing," Sally Peters broke in. "Yes, she can hear,—as she describes."

"I can," Miss Mills repeated, calmly, and as she

raised her big gray eyes to the detective's face, he was inclined to believe anything she might say.

"Why would Mrs. Howland go downstairs so late?" asked O'Brien, as he carefully watched the various faces.

"To begin with," Miss Mills vouchsafed, "Mrs. Howland is erratic and is quite likely to wander over the house at night if she is wakeful. Also, last night there were several thunderstorms. Mrs. Howland is afraid of these, and she doubtless went down to seek her husband. I know she started to do so earlier, while Mr. Swift was with him, but hearing the men engaged in conversation she came back upstairs without going into the library."

"You saw all this?"

"Yes, I stood in the upper hall waiting to see if I could do anything for Mrs. Howland. But when she came up she only said good night and went to her room."

"What time was this?"

"About twelve o'clock—I don't know nearer than that."

"But you heard Mrs. Howland go down again later?"

"Yes."

"At what time?"

"I can't tell you. I was wakeful myself and was lying in bed, in the dark, so I don't know the time exactly. But I should say it must have been at least one o'clock. Perhaps half-past one."

O'Brien turned to the doctors.

"What time do you figure that Mr. Howland died?"

"About twelve or one o'clock," Doctor Mason said.

"It's impossible to say," the older doctor put in. "We medical men are not clairvoyant. We can deduce from symptoms as to the approximate time, but we cannot say positively within an hour or two."

"Well, we must be sure that he was alive when Mary went down," Sally Peters said quickly; "if he hadn't been she would have raised an outcry."

Doctor Avery bit his lower lip,—with him a sure sign of deep agitation. He alone knew that Mary Howland had said she already knew it when he informed her her husband was dead. What line of conjecture this might open up he was afraid to think.

"That's what I say," he put in, abruptly. "It's not possible to state these hours exactly. Miss Mills is not sure of the time Mrs. Howland went downstairs, Doctor Mason and I cannot be sure of the exact hour of Mr. Howland's death, nor can we make a good guess at it until we know what killed him. So, I hold that Mrs. Peters' point is well taken. At whatever hour Mrs. Howland went downstairs, it was before the death of her husband."

"As to the house," asked O'Brien. "Was it locked up for the night?"

Leonard Swift answered this question.

"We never lock up for the night," he said, with a slight smile. "In this peaceful community rob-

bery is a thing unknown. Never in my experience has Howland House had a key turned or a window fastened at night."

Chief Weldon nodded his head. "Nobody does around here," he said. "If you suspect an intruder, O'Brien, there was doubtless ample chance for one to enter."

"Indeed, yes," Swift assented. "The front door is never fastened, and when I left Mr. Howland the library windows were all wide open."

"But it was raining," objected the detective.

"Not then. The showers were fitful and slight,—mere dashes of rain with rumbling thunder and sudden sharp flashes of lightning. And, too, the wide verandah roof shelters the porch so that no rain ever reaches the windows. It was warm and close, the steam heat was going in the house, and the night was sultry and oppressive, so all the library windows were open,—of that I'm sure."

"Yes, they were," Magee said. He spoke almost mechanically, his eyes fixed on the questioning detective.

O'Brien returned his gaze, and said, suddenly, "In what mood was Mr. Howland when you left him, Mr. Magee?"

"Angry," said Magee, succinctly.

"At you?"

"No."

"At whom?"

"Oh,—nobody in particular—at circumstances—"

"He was angry at me," Rob Peters broke in. "I

had been talking to him and trying to interest him in a business proposal. He was very angry."

"Since Mr. Peters admits it, that is the truth," said Magee, gravely.

"Was Mr. Howland still angry when you talked to him, Mr. Swift? After Mr. Magee had left you?"

"He was getting over it," said Swift, speaking slowly, as if choosing his words. "He was, I think, only temporarily anonyed at Mr. Peters' persistence."

"Oh, Mr. Peters persisted, did he? On what subject?"

"I wanted Mr. Howland to put some money into a mining project," Peters said; "he did not see it as I did, and we discussed it. I think the matter has no further interest for any of us now."

"I'm not so sure of that," and the questioner looked at him keenly,

"Call in the butler, or whoever first discovered Mr. Howland in the library this morning," Weldon decreed.

Both Martin and Charles were summoned. They gave a detailed account of their discovery and awaited further questions.

"This Conrad,—who is he?" asked O'Brien, interested at once.

Doctor Avery responded. "He's the village half-wit. A poor harmless boy, who moons about doing nothing most of the time."

"Boy?"

"He's about thirty, but he has so little intellect that every one speaks of him as a boy. I have known him all his life, and he has no homicidal mania, nor would he have intelligence to wreak real harm on any one."

"Oh, I don't suspect him of murder," said Weldon, "but it seems queer for him to be here, so far from his home, at all hours."

"He has always done so," Avery returned. "His vagaries are inexplicable. But if any one is kind to him, and the Howlands always have been, he haunts their homes,—wanders in and out as he likes, and no one seems to mind him."

"I mind him," said Edith Mills. "I can't bear him. He gives me the creeps. He was prowling about this house all night long. I heard him."

"I suppose, though, his evidence would be of no value?" asked O'Brien.

"None at all," said Doctor Avery, positively. "If he answered a question his answer could not be depended on as truth. He is the son of the undertaker of the village, and one of his deep-seated notions is to get work for his father. He spends much of his time in his father's shop and for the rest he wanders about aimlessly."

CHAPTER V

The Clause in the Will

THERE was much more talk, much more inquiry; more discussion and controversy; but the afternoon shadows began to fall with the great question still unsettled as to whether Ralph Howland met his death at the hands of a murderer or died from natural causes.

Chief Weldon and his detectives, as well as Doctor Mason, seemed bent on the crime theory, while Doctor Avery and all the members of the household took the other view.

Thus, it was plain to be seen, that all were more or less influenced by their own inclinations.

But the police could get no definite evidence to help them out.

It was all very well to say that since medical skill and experience could discover no natural cause of death there must have been a crime, but it was another thing to prove this.

Both Weldon and O'Brien questioned and probed and racked their brains for ingenious theories to fit the case, but found none.

Yet Doctor Mason persisted in his story of the fleeting whiff of the odor of prussic acid, and though Doctor Avery scoffed at it, if it were true it meant a fine start out for a poisoning case.

As county medical examiner, Mason was in full authority. He, therefore, gave burial permit, but he reserved his decision as to what was the cause of death.

And so Conrad's father was at last called in.

John Stryker was accustomed to houses of mourning, and was possessed of that sleek, shuffling manner peculiar to undertakers.

But he had never been ushered into a household like this before, and he at once sensed the fact that sympathy was neither expected nor desired.

So, always adaptable, he stood, awaiting orders and watching for a cue as to how to conduct himself.

"I'm in charge, Mr. Stryker," Leonard Swift said, and his bearing was that of a man suddenly called upon to assume great responsibilities. "You will please attend to all details of the funeral of Mr. Howland, referring all matters of importance to me. Mrs. Howland is too ill to consider these matters at all, so you will look to me for instructions. Advice or counsel of Doctor Avery is at your disposal, of course. As to the funeral appointments, let them be dignified and proper, without any undue or ostentatious display."

"Yes, sir,—yes, sir," said the black-garbed man, deferentially. "I have brought my books, sir,—will you,—ah,—select a—a casket?"

"Lord, no! Select it yourself. Merely remember, I said, dignified and proper,—see, dignified and proper."

"Yes, sir,—but the style, now,—the,—the cost—"

"Go and look over his books, Swift," advised Magee. "Really, you ought to take more interest—"

"I don't need advice from you, Magee," Leonard Swift said, coldly. "When I do, I'll ask for it."

The secretary's face showed the flicker of a smile, a superior sort of smile, quite enough to nettle Swift.

He rose quickly and left the room in the wake of the somber undertaker.

"A moment, please, Mr. Stryker," said Weldon, calling him back. "Just a word about that boy of yours. He wasn't at home last night?"

Stryker's face showed a sudden agonized look, as one reminded newly of an ever-present grief.

"No," he said, "but Conrad rarely is at home nights. He is,—he is not responsible, you see, and as he is quite harmless, I let him go where he will. He has done so for many years and no harm has ever come of it. Was he here?"

"Yes; most of the night. Now, Mr. Stryker, there is perhaps a mystery about this death of Mr. Howland. If your son saw anything, could he tell us of it?"

"No;" and the father's face was positive though very grave. "No reliance whatever can be placed on his word. He does not mean to lie, he does not know lying is wrong; but his memory is a blank, and so he says one thing one minute and the opposite the next. He made no trouble, did he? My Conrad?"

So pathetic was the man's face that Weldon said gently, "Not at all, Mr. Stryker. That is all. You may go."

"And yet the idiot boy was in the library last night," said the detective, Green.

Unlike O'Brien, this man was not given to asking questions, but preferred looking about, searching for clews, or, by watching people's faces, learning more, he believed, than could be gathered from their actual speech.

"How do you know that?" asked Magee, surprised out of his usual calm.

"Who else let the bird out?" Green said. "I'm told this idiot chap has a sort of mania for freeing captive animals. Must it not be, then, that he freed the canary?"

"It may be," said Sally Peters, but Miss Mills said, "More likely not. Charles takes care of that bird, and he is sometimes careless enough to leave the cage door ajar. I've often fastened it after him."

"But that would be in the morning, wouldn't it?" and Green eyed the girl keenly. "Birds are usually bathed in the morning."

"But they are fed again at night," Edith Mills spoke pertly. "At least our birds are."

"It's immaterial, anyway," Weldon said; "I can't connect that poor half-wit with this crime—"

"If it is a crime!" said Magee, speaking almost angrily.

"It's a crime, all right," Green said, and then he lapsed into his usual thoughtful silence.

But he broke it later with a sudden announcement that he would take finger-prints of everybody.

Weldon smiled. "I wondered how long before you'd get at that," he said. "Mr. Green is a firm believer in the finger-print method. I trust no one will object, for Green takes every hand from the head of the house to the lowest scullery-maid."

"The head of the house is dead," said Magee, solemnly, and quite as if he refused to recognize Swift's claim to that title.

"That won't prevent my getting his prints," and with that Green left the room.

"Good heavens, do you suppose he'll go in and pester Mary?" said Doctor Avery.

"Yes, he will," Sally said; "he's just that sort. Let's go and head him off."

They found Green in the library. He had already taken the impressions of Ralph Howland's dead hand and was now engaged in obtaining prints from Leonard Swift's finger-tips.

After a moment, during which the doctor and Sally Peters watched the procedure with interest, Green said, "I say, Mr. Swift, did you notice anything different in the library this morning from when you left it last night? Anything, I mean, that would suggest the presence of a person in here after yourself?"

The straightforward stare of Green's eyes proved

the honest intent of his question, and Swift replied:

"No, Mr. Green, I think not. Or, well, yes, there's one thing. There was a red book, a novel, on the desk, at Mr. Howland's right hand. I don't see it there now."

"A novel, now? Do you know the name of it?"

"Yes, I do, for it's a book we've all been reading. It's called 'A Rolling Stone,' a very popular story."

"Yes, oh, yes. I've read it,—everybody has. And it was here when you left the room? Who owns it?"

"It was Mr. Howland's, I suppose. It has been around for some time, sometimes in one room, then in another. I dare say 'tis of no consequence."

"Probably not,—probably not. And now, I must get on with my work. Every finger in this house,—that's my intention."

"You'll excuse Mrs. Howland?" said Doctor Avery. "As her physician, I advise against it."

"Oh, pshaw, now, doctor, it won't hurt her a bit. Why, it will only take a minute."

"But what's the use, Mr. Green? Surely you don't suspect Mrs. Howland brought about her husband's death?"

"No, but when I take the prints I want a complete set,—of everybody that was in the house. If you object further, doctor, I shall think you have some definite reason for doing so. You know it cannot really harm Mrs. Howland."

"It may. She is in a seriously nervous state. A

further shock might easily unseat her reason entirely."

"I won't shock her. I'll guarantee that she will be interested in the procedure."

Avery said no more, and Green went on his way without further restrictions.

He had rather an ingratiating manner, and he so wheedled Nurse Lane that she readily allowed him to take her finger-prints, and also ushered him into the little boudoir where Mary Howland sat.

"What is it?" Mrs. Howland said, looking at the detective.

Green regarded her closely. To his experienced eye the process Doctor Avery had called unseating her reason had already taken place. Her glance, though direct enough, was a little vacant, a little unseeing.

"Nothing much," said Green, casually. "Just put your finger-tips on this sheet of paper, please, Mrs. Howland."

Without the least objection, she did as directed, and then Green said, "Where did you put the will, Mrs. Howland?"

"In that box," Mary replied, pointing to a leather box on the table.

"May I take it, please,—they want it downstairs."

She made no objection, and Green took the document and put it in his pocket. Mary's eyes followed his movements, but still with that blank unseeing stare of one who does not quite comprehend.

"Avery's right," Green thought to himself. "A jolt of any sort would make her a maniac. But as yet, she is holding onto her brain."

Lane hovered in the background, watchful-eyed, but making no attempt to restrain the detective's activities.

Green went downstairs and gave the will to Weldon, with a brief account of its finding.

"What made you think she had it?" Weldon asked.

"Why, I had looked in the drawer they spoke of, and it wasn't there. But on the drawer were fresh finger-prints, and as soon as I saw Mrs. Howland's hands I knew they were hers. Nothing surprising that she should have possession of her husband's will, but—it may establish the fact that she was downstairs last night,—later than the men were."

"H'm. Is she crazy enough to have killed him?"

"I don't see how she could have done so. She's crazy enough,—yes,—but how?"

"How was he killed, anyway?"

"Doctor Avery knows more than he tells. He's shielding somebody—"

"Must be Mrs. Howland, then. Who else?"

"Might be anybody in the house. I can't think Mason knows more than Avery about that prussic acid odor. I think Avery wants to hush it up—"

"Well, he shan't. I'm going to get at the truth of this thing. Now, I should say that will had better be read. Get the people together."

The entire household was summoned to the read-

ing of Ralph Howland's will. Mary Howland was not present, but was left in charge of Etta, her maid, while Nurse Lane joined the others.

The provisions of the will were simple. About a third of the estate was left to Mary Howland. A large bequest was made to Austin Magee and goodly sums were left to Nurse Lane, to Miss Mills, and to several of the servants. A few friendly bequests were left to friends, including Mr. Peters, and the residuary legatee was Leonard Swift.

But, and there was an important and astounding proviso, the bequest to Swift was not to be made "if my daughter Angela should be found."

"Angela!" cried Sally Peters, "why, she died when she was a baby!"

"Five years old," Doctor Avery corrected her.

"What does that clause mean?" asked Rob Peters, curiously. "How could the child be found? Was there any doubt of her death, Doctor Avery?"

"Not the slightest. She died of the sleeping sickness. There was a terrible epidemic of that disease, and half the children of Normandale succumbed."

"Then Ralph's mind must have been affected," said Peters. "And with Mary's brain unsettled, that gives us two irresponsibles to consider."

"Conrad making three," Leonard Swift added. "But I don't understand this thing. You're executor of the will, Magee, what do you know about it?"

"I know that Mr. Howland believed that his daughter did not die in infancy, but that she is still alive—somewhere."

"Had he any real reason to think that?" said Doctor Avery, looking absolutely dumfounded. "If so, why was I not told about it?"

"He had a reason to think it might be so," Magee returned, speaking slowly, and it seemed, unwillingly. "He hoped it might be so. But it is all uncertain. I'd prefer not to say more at present."

"By Jove, you will say more," Leonard Swift spoke angrily. "Not say more, indeed! You'll tell all you know about this absurd story and tell it mighty quick, too. I'll have you know that such a clause jeopardizes my interests, and I won't stand for it! I believe that somebody," he looked straight at Magee, "that somebody has trumped up a plan to make believe Angela is still living! Absurd!"

"I think, Mr. Magee, you must tell all you know about this strange thing," said Weldon, in his most judicial manner.

"But why?" said Magee. "The will distinctly states that the property is to be Mr. Swift's, unless the daughter appears. How can anything I have to say affect that?"

"I told you so!" Swift cried. "There is a plot afoot to do me out of this inheritance, and Austin Magee is at the bottom of it."

"There is no plot," Magee said, quietly, "and if there were, it would be Mr. Howland's, not mine. It is his will we are discussing."

"There is a plot," Swift persisted; "I hold, Mr. Weldon, that you must make Mr. Magee tell all he

knows,—which, of course, amounts to nothing of importance!"

"I will tell," said Magee, suddenly. "I think, perhaps it is the wisest course."

His bearing was that of a man with a weighty secret to impart, and the little audience listened breathlessly.

"About two years ago," Magee began, "we had a notice from the Cemetery Association in Grantburg—"

"Where is Grantburg?" interrupted Swift.

"It is a small town in New Jersey, and it is where Angela Howland is buried," Doctor Avery informed him.

"Was buried," corrected Magee. "Yes, it is a small town, and the home of Mrs. Howland's girlhood days. When her child died, she wanted the interment in the old family plot at Grantburg, so the little casket was sent there."

"I remember perfectly," said Avery. "I myself superintended its despatch, for Mrs. Howland was too ill and Mr. Howland too distraught to see to it."

"And you sent the casket out there by express," said Magee.

"Yes, it was during the awful epidemic. I couldn't leave to go myself and it was expressed to the cemetery people out there. I went out there later to assure myself that everything was all right. I learned that it was and that Angela had been buried in the family plot. At the interment there

were many of the relatives of Mrs. Howland and many friends and neighbors. I satisfied myself that everything was all right and reported to Mr. Howland."

"Yes," and Magee looked thoughtfully at the doctor, "it was all right—as far as the burial went. But, it was an empty casket that was buried that day."

"What! Impossible!" Doctor Avery's eyes nearly bulged out of his head. "Why, I know it was the right casket,—I had selected it myself,—a little white one with silver handles,—and,—why, the nameplate was on it, besides!"

"Yes, that is all true,—but the casket was empty when it was put in the ground."

"How do you know?" Doctor Avery spoke in an awed voice.

"Because, as I began to tell you, about two years ago, Mr. Howland received word from the cemetery people, that owing to freshets the river that runs through the cemetery had overflowed its banks so often that lots on the bank of the river were unsafe, and it was necessary to remove the bodies buried in those lots to other localities. The lot of Mrs. Howland's family was one of these, and the relatives there had decided to have Mr. Howland consulted regarding the body of his daughter. Others from the same family plot were to be transferred to another part of the cemetery.

"Mr. Howland at first thought he would merely direct that his daughter's casket be moved with the

rest,—then he changed his mind and asked me to go out there and see about it. He had a great desire,—perhaps it was morbid, but it was very strong, to look again on the face of his child, if the remains were in such condition as to render it advisable. He asked me to go out first and see as to this. He had been told that children dying of that disease preserved their natural looks for many years. I did not at all enjoy the prospect of the errand, but I could not refuse Mr. Howland's request. So I went, and there was absolutely nothing in that little casket. Nor was it possible that there had been a body buried in it. The satin lining was fresh and clean, though a trifle yellowed by time. But there was no dust, no bits of the clothing, no signs of a disintegrated body. It would be impossible for the remains to have disappeared so absolutely and leave no trace or stain.

"I conferred with the cemetery authorities, and while surprised beyond measure, they agreed that there had been no body buried in that coffin. For it was improbable, practically impossible for it to have been removed without their knowledge. It was an utter mystery, and I bound them to secrecy until I could report to Mr. Howland and learn his desires in the matter."

"Incredible!" Doctor Avery said, staring at Magee as at some strange being. "I can't seem to believe it."

"Yet it is all true," Magee said, "exactly as I have told it. Nor do we know anything that in any

way explains the mystery. Ever since my discovery, Mr. Howland and I have been trying to learn something further about it, but have been unable to do so. We questioned Mr. Stryker very closely as to the details of the shipment and so forth."

"Mr. Stryker is here now," suggested the doctor, "why not call him in?"

The undertaker was summoned, and he repeated what he had already told Ralph Howland.

"I can't understand or explain it," he said. "I put the little body in the casket myself and closed the lid. At that time there was a terrible rush of business, so many children died at once, and I was overworked. But I remember distinctly the Howland child and I know I did all my duties exactly as usual. I remember the little girl well. She wore a short white frock, trimmed with lace, and a string of coral,—not beads, but that branchy coral that looks broken."

"And you sent the casket to the train yourself?"

"Of course I did. Went to the depot with it and saw it properly shipped. I had receipts from the New Jersey people and due notice of its safe arrival."

"Then," said Detective Green, "the body must have been taken out *en route*. That is a strange thing to happen! Was the casket opened at the time of the burial in New Jersey?"

"No," said Austin Magee, "it was not."

CHAPTER VI

The Girl in the Doorway

"THAT'S stranger yet!" said Leonard Swift, who was listening with a resentful look in his dark eyes. "Why wasn't it?"

"No, that's not strange," Doctor Avery said; "the casket was taken from the railroad directly to the cemetery, and the interment did not seem to call for its opening."

"Why are you so distressed, doctor?" Sally Peters asked kindly. "No possible blame can attach to you, —nor to Mr. Stryker. If the little casket was robbed of its contents on the way, you are not responsible."

"It was all wrong to send it unattended," Doctor Avery said, broodingly. "I said so at the time, but there seemed nothing else to do. An epidemic, such as that one was, left no time or opportunity for anything except the care of the living."

"Look here," Swift said, suddenly, "if there was nothing in that casket when it was buried, why didn't the New Jersey people notice how light it was?"

"They didn't," said Magee. "I suppose they didn't know how big the child was. They may have thought her a mere baby. Anyway, a child's casket, boxed, is of sufficient weight to ignore the added

weight of the little body. I'm giving you the explanation they gave me out there. I think the truth is, they never thought anything about that point. However, there's my story and it's a true one. Now, for the past two years, Mr. Howland has been trying in every possible way to get some inkling of what could have become of his daughter. His theory is that she was taken from that casket alive."

"Alive!" cried Doctor Avery. "Impossible!"

"But is it impossible, doctor?" Magee asked. "In the rush and hurry of the epidemic, might it not be possible that you thought the child dead, when she was not?"

"My God!" groaned the doctor, "if I thought that—"

"It is only theory," went on Magee. "But it became an obsession with Mr. Howland. He thoroughly believed that little Angela did not die,—that she awakened and was somehow released from the casket and that she is still alive. It was this belief that made him add that condition to his will."

"Does Mary Howland know of this?" asked Mrs. Peters.

"Not a word," replied Magee. "Mr. Howland would not tell her, knowing the uncertainty would be harder for her to bear than the loss of the child."

"Do you suppose she read this will?" asked Green, suddenly.

"I dare say," returned Doctor Avery, "and I believe that is what has made her so much more unsettled in her mind. The implication that Angela

could be alive was quite enough to disturb her brain to the extent of irresponsibility."

"Well, I think it's all poppycock," said Leonard Swift, scornfully. "I'm quite willing to take the chances of that child turning up again. She never will. I agree the body must have been taken from the casket on its way to its final resting place, but I don't for a minute believe it was a live body. It had been in the closed casket over night,—had it not, Mr. Stryker?"

"Yes, it had," said the undertaker positively, "in my rooms."

"The child couldn't survive that, could she, doctor?"

"No," replied Avery, speaking as one in a daze. And indeed, this strange story had completely floored the good old doctor. If he had really thought the Howland child dead when she wasn't, he could never forgive himself!

"This whole story is strange and exceedingly interesting," said Chief Weldon, at last, "but, even at that, it is not our present business. That is, to find out if Mr. Howland was put to death and, if so, by whom. I cannot see as the reading of his will has thrown any light on this matter."

"Except," said Green, "that it is sure that Mrs. Howland came downstairs late last night and took the will away with her. Might it be possible, Doctor Avery, that the knowledge of the will's contents turned her brain, and in her madness she killed her husband?"

"It is quite possible that the reference to her daughter would cause her to lose her mind, but I cannot see how that indicates crime on her part."

"Mad people are often very ingenious," persisted Green, who was really greatly impressed with this new idea.

"But how could she do it?"

"Hatpin," said Green, shortly. "You doctors say you can't find any wound, but there must be one. People don't die of no cause whatever. A hatpin is a woman's weapon, and its mark is so infinitesimal that it can easily be overlooked in the most careful search. I'm told, too, that a tiny puncture like that closes up again entirely, so it is really indiscernible."

"Not likely," growled Doctor Avery, who was nervously upset by the mental strain he was passing through.

"But possible," Green insisted. "A puncture at the base of the brain—he has such thick hair you'd never see it—"

"There wasn't any," and Avery spoke sternly. "I looked especially for that."

Green said no more, but he shook an obstinate head.

"At risk of repetition," said O'Brien, "I'd like you men to tell me again of your visits to the library last evening. Who went there first, to talk to Mr. Howland?"

"I did," said Rob Peters. "As soon as the dinner

guests had gone, I went there at once to discuss a business project with him."

"Was your talk pleasant—amicable?"

"If you mean did we quarrel,—we did not. But we were not any too amicable, for we disagreed on the subject in hand."

"Which was?"

"A mining project in which I hoped to interest Mr. Howland,—but I failed."

Peters spoke bitterly, as if still harboring rancor against the dead man.

"Who went in next?"

"I," answered Austin Magee.

"You found Mr. Peters there?"

"Yes."

"Did you hear any of the conversation?"

"Only a few words."

"Of what tenor were they?"

"Merely persistent pleading on Mr. Peters' part, and continued refusals from Mr. Howland."

Magee spoke indifferently, as if the subject was without interest for him.

"And who came in next?"

"Mr. Peters went away," Magee vouchsafed, "and I was alone with Mr. Howland for a short time, and then Mr. Swift came and I left and went upstairs to bed."

"What were you and Mr. Howland discussing, Mr. Magee?"

"We were talking on the, to him, all-absorbing subject of his daughter."

"They were," exclaimed Swift, "I heard them as I entered. And Magee was trying to persuade Mr. Howland that she had been found! Ridiculous! I can tell you all, that as master here, I will stand none of this hocus pocus! It's all of a piece with the mediums and spiritists who try to deceive gullible men and women about the return of their sons lost in the war! I mean, they pretend to get messages, and bring back the spirits of the dead ones,—in this case, there is an even greater deceit, in pretending to recover a living body!"

Austin Magee frowned a little as he silently contemplated the speaker. It was plain to be seen Leonard Swift was greatly annoyed at the idea of a living Angela and did not believe in any such thing.

"At what time was this, Mr. Magee?" asked O'Brien.

"When I went upstairs? About half-past eleven, I should say. I don't know positively."

"I do," said Edith Mills. "It was just half-past eleven."

"Why were you listening?" the detective asked her suddenly.

"I wasn't,—especially," and she fixed her gray eyes on him in a way that disconcerted him a little. "I have especially good hearing and I hear every one that goes up or downstairs or through the halls, particularly at night when the house is still."

"And you always note the time?"

This was intended to be sarcastic, but it missed

its mark, for Miss Mills merely continued her contemplative gaze, saying, "Nearly always."

"And what did you and Mr. Howland talk about, Mr. Swift?" was the next inquiry.

"Only on matters in general. We talked about the mining proposition, and I learned that Mr. Howland was definitely against it—"

"He was leaning toward it in his talk with me," Magee deliberately interrupted the speaker.

"Was he? Was he, Magee?" and Rob Peters looked suddenly alert.

"Very much so," Magee assured him, but Leonard Swift said coldly, "Mr. Magee must have misunderstood him, for Mr. Howland told me he would have nothing to do with it."

"And what other subjects arose?"

"Only a few unimportant business matters. Incidentally, Mr. Howland spoke of his will and showed me where it was, in the cabinet drawer."

"He showed it to you?"

"No, but he told me the gist of its contents. He did not, however, say anything about his daughter."

"The drawer was unlocked?"

"It was at that time. I assumed Mr. Howland would lock it up before he retired."

"You left him there, in the library?"

"Yes; I bade him good night and went upstairs at a little after twelve, I think."

"You heard Mr. Swift go upstairs, Miss Mills?" and the detective turned to her.

"I am not officially a timekeeper in this house," she said, "but, yes, I did hear Mr. Swift come up, a little after midnight."

"And at what time did you then go downstairs yourself?"

O'Brien shot the question at her with such suddenness that the girl was caught off her guard and stammered a trifle as she replied:

"Why—why,—I didn't go down at all."

"Oh, yes, you did,—after Mr. Swift came up."

"How do you know that?"

"You went down for that red book,—that novel—"

"Oh, yes, so I did," and Edith Mills spoke quickly. "You see, I was very wakeful, and I wanted that book to read, so I slipped down and got it. Mr. Howland sat there, but he was thinking deeply, so I just took the book and went back, softly. I don't think he even heard me come in."

"What time was this?"

"Oh, I don't know,—I'd been awake a long time, —not so very long—"

"Miss Mills, was Mr. Howland alive when you went into that room?"

"Why, yes, of course,—that is,—I suppose so—oh, I don't know!" and the girl burst into a flood of nervous tears.

"You saw him sitting at his desk—"

"Yes."

"His head bowed over—?"

"A little,—as if he might have been asleep."

"Be careful what you say, Miss Mills. And tell me about what hour that was."

"I don't know, I tell you— Leave me alone!"

She rose and rushed out of the room and up the stairs.

"Never mind her now," O'Brien said, as Sally Peters rose to follow her. "She won't run away, and she has told all she knows."

"If I may be permitted a suggestion," Rob Peters said, "why not quiz that idiot boy, Conrad. To be sure he wouldn't tell a coherent story, but he might give some broken sentences that would offer a clew."

"I expect to do that," and O'Brien nodded, "all in good time."

"He's outside, prowling about now," said Sally, who was near the window.

"Have him in," ordered Swift. "Let's see what we can do with him."

But they could do little with the poor chap. He answered all questions willing and volubly, but his statements made no sense.

"You here last night?" O'Brien began, a little uncertain how to address this strange witness.

"Yeppy,—yeppy," and the lack-luster eyes rolled about uncannily. "Yep, I was here all night—all night."

"You let the bird out of his cage?"

"Yes, yes, yes,—poor little birdie. I let him out, —I let him out. Nice little birdie. Where'd he go?"

"Were you on the porch, looking in the window all night?"

"All night—all night—all night I was."

Sally Peters hastily left the room. The idiot's sing-song got on her nerves too much for her to remain.

But O'Brien made a few more efforts.

"You saw Mr. Howland through the window?"

"Oh, yes,—oh, yes,—all night. He sleeps in his chair! In his chair! Not go to bed—oh, no."

"When you came in the room and let out the bird was Mr. Howland asleep?"

"Oh, yes, very asleep—very asleep."

"Did you touch him?"

"Wake him up? Oh, no,—no. Let him sleep,—poor man so tired. I go out softly,—softly,—softly."

"Now, whatever happened to Ralph Howland, that idiot had no hand in it," declared Swift. "Do send him away,—he's awful!"

"I awful?" and Conrad roused a semblance of mild anger. "Bad Mr. Swift,—don't call poor Conrad awful."

"Better not antagonize him, Swift," Austin Magee said; "he doesn't forgive easily."

"He can't remember," and Swift laughed. "Send him away, O'Brien."

"Just a minute. From the window, Conrad, when you looked in, who was in here?"

"All everybody. Charles come,—and Martin

come,—and Misser Swift, and Misser Magee, and Misser that man," pointing to Peters, "and Angel lady come."

"That's Mrs. Howland," Magee explained. "She may or may not have come, but that's Conrad's name for her."

"Yes, angel lady come," Conrad repeated, "and gay girl come—"

"That's Miss Mills," Magee again said, explanatorily, "the boy has names for us all."

"You saw all these in the room?"

"Oh, yes,—oh, yes,—oh, yes,—"

"Perhaps he did and perhaps he didn't," Magee said. "There is really no reliance to be placed on his statements. We've often proved that."

So the half-wit was sent away, and none of his story was taken into consideration.

The detectives continued to investigate, but there was little learned aside from what was already known.

The death of Ralph Howland seemed to be an insoluble mystery, which, perhaps, was no mystery at all.

Leonard Swift and the Peterses declared they were sure it was a simple case of heart failure, saying that disease often lay dormant and unsuspected.

Austin Magee, having been several times snubbed by Swift, expressed almost no opinions and seemed to be awaiting developments.

Doctor Avery felt his burdens almost greater than he could bear.

The responsibility of deciding the cause of Howland's death, the ever-present responsibility of taking care of Mary Howland, her mind now a merciful blank, but liable to break into mania at any moment, and, most fearful of all, the fear that he had been the means of the enclosure of a living child in a casket, with results utterly unknown, was almost too much for the placid, easy-going old man, whose life had passed with little or no such excitement as this.

The whole village became aroused over the matter. It could not be kept secret, and the report that Angela Howland's body had been taken from its coffin stirred the town to a frenzy. Each mother who had lost a child in the dread epidemic of sixteen years ago at once feared her baby had been buried alive, and John Stryker's life became a burden from the visits of distracted women.

Wild stories were rife as to premature burials, which when traced to their source proved to be pure fiction.

The funeral of Ralph Howland was held without any further elucidation of the mystery of his death.

No definite word was had of a living Angela, and Austin Magee vouchsafed no information regarding what he knew of the matter.

"I know no facts," he said, once, in answer to importunate inquiries. "It was all a theory of Mr.

Howland's brain, and I shall tell it to no one, unless Mrs. Howland gets well enough to hear it, or unless something definite transpires."

Leonard Swift took possession of his inheritance as soon as matters could be arranged. He gave Austin Magee notice that his services were no longer required, but Magee returned that he was executor of the will, and should stay on to see that its bequests were duly carried out. He said that if Swift wished, he would go to live at the village inn, but he should prefer to remain in the house for a few weeks or so.

Swift couldn't deny him this without being positively churlish, so Magee remained.

Mary Howland, kept in absolute quiet and seclusion by Nurse Lane, grew better in mind and body and forgot, apparently, what she had read in the will.

Indeed, Doctor Avery was not sure that she had read it, after all. But the good doctor did have a slight fear, deep in his heart, that Mary Howland was responsible for the death of her husband.

He had not noticed the prussic acid odor, but he fully believed his colleague's attestation of its presence. And that, without question, meant poison. How Mary Howland could accomplish such a deed, he didn't know, but the old man was without much imagination, and he assumed that the cunning of a disordered brain could accomplish many things.

He breathed this to no one, except for a hint to Nurse Lane of the possibility. This hint Lane

buried deep in her own heart and kept even closer watch over her beloved charge.

The Howland lawyer, one Esterbrook, came often to the house, to advise and assist in the settlements.

One afternoon, perhaps a fortnight after the death of Ralph Howland, Esterbrook was in the library with Swift, Magee and the stenographer, Miss Mills.

After a slight tap, Martin opened the door.

Without a word he ushered in a girl,—a young thing, slim, dainty and exquisitely gowned.

She stood, framed in the doorway, one hand on the knob, and looked from one to another of the men, her glance finally coming to rest on Edith Mills.

The two girls stared, seemingly spellbound; Miss Mills' bold, eager eyes taking in every detail of the simple but chic costume of the stranger, while she, in turn, absorbed Edith Mills in one comprehensive glance.

Then, stepping inside, she stood a moment, still silent.

A dark fur round her neck seemed to choke her, and she loosened it with an impulsive gesture.

Again, she glanced in turn at each man, and then, seemingly by instinct, she moved nearer to the lawyer, Esterbrook.

"I am Angela Howland," she said. "Where is my mother?"

CHAPTER VII

"I Am Angela!"

THE way the four hearers took this speech was an interesting study in human nature. James Esterbrook exhibited all the signs of a man who has received a stunning shock. His lips parted slightly, his eyes stared, and he thrust his head forward as if in an endeavor to understand, while his hands gripped tightly the arms of his chair.

Austin Magee, also startled, had an alert eager air, and he gazed intently at the girl, though now and then his eyes darted from one to another of the group, apparently to note their mental attitudes.

Leonard Swift looked both angry and incredulous. He fairly glared at the intruder,—for it was quite evident that he so considered her. His lips moved uncertainly, as if he were about to speak, but undecided what to say.

Edith Mills was the most composed of any. She surveyed the visitor calmly, she even gave her an enigmatical little smile, but her face expressed an amused tolerance as if she couldn't take this thing seriously.

The girl who had come in did not repeat her words, but stood, her hand still on the doorknob,

and with questioning eyes, as she awaited a response.

None came for a moment.

Leonard Swift was thinking: "A brazen impostor! How dare she?"

The lawyer thought: "Can it be possible? How pretty she is!"

Magee pondered: "There is one definite resemblance, at least."

And Edith Mills said to herself: "What perfect clothes,—and how well she wears them!"

The girl was garbed in soft black. Her outer garment was of cape fashion, which, as it fell back over her outstretched hand, showed a white lining.

Round her little white throat was a string of black beads and on her heavy, soft, black hair was a small toque with a long, curling feather.

Her eyes were brown and mutely appealing as she looked from one to another, yet as the silence continued, a mutinous expression curved her very red lips, and she seemed about to speak again.

But Swift forestalled her.

"What do you mean," he said, in a tone of illy suppressed anger, "by such a claim? If you think you can impose on me, you are greatly mistaken. Who are you?"

"I am Angela Howland," she repeated, unabashed and also unmoved by Swift's quite evident antagonism. "As to my claims or credentials, I will disclose them to no one but my mother."

The red lips shut with an air of finality, and Edith

Mills wondered what lipstick the girl used to get that exceedingly natural effect. Her cheeks, too, were faintly rose-tinted, with a bloom that Miss Mills recognized as art, though the men did not.

"In the first place," Esterbrook found his voice at last, "Mrs. Howland is ill and is not receiving visitors. In the second place, I, as her lawyer, and the lawyer of her late husband, cannot allow you to make your astonishing statement without attendant proofs, which must be shown to me and to Mr. Swift."

"Mrs. Howland is ill?" the girl said, her eyes full of affection, "then let me go to her at once, I tell you I am her daughter,—Angela."

She said the last word, with a caressing accent, as if the sound of it pleased her. Her manner was distant, unconcerned, but very gentle.

Her whole attitude was that of one who expects no resistance and is even unable to recognize any.

But Leonard Swift had lost his temper, and he blurted out, rudely:

"There's no use, Miss,—you can't put this thing over! You've heard somehow of this strange case, and you've trumped up a plan,—but it won't work. Better give it up and go away quietly."

The girl's eyes,—they were of that glinting brown,—rather beryl than hazel,—turned slowly to Swift, and their regard was so appraising, so wondering, that he fidgeted a little.

Then she turned to Esterbrook.

"If you are a lawyer," she said, "you will see

that I have justice done me. You must agree that since Angela Howland is missing, and since I claim that I am Angela Howland, my story should be heard."

"I do agree to that," Esterbrook said, "there can be no doubt of that. But your story must be told to us,—not to Mrs. Howland, who is really too ill to hear it."

"But I will cure her—" the girl looked wonderfully sweet,—"I am Angela."

Her simple statement seemed to her sufficient, but the others were not so easily satisfied.

Edith Mills, engrossed in her study of this very strange person, decided at once that she was an impostor but a very clever one.

Austin Magee studied her and concluded that she might be the right one after all.

Lawyer Esterbrook did not for a moment believe in her, and Swift, too angry to think clearly, had but one idea,—to get rid of her.

"Tell your story," commanded the lawyer, briefly.

"For all of my life that I can remember," the girl began, and even as she spoke, she took the seat that Edith Mills drew forward for her, not one of the men having performed this courtesy.

But the visitor seemed not to notice the dereliction, and she threw back her fur-collared cape with the nonchalant ease of a familiar guest. Then, producing a dainty cigarette case, she selected one and lighted it. For this, she asked no permission, save

a slight inquiring glance in the direction of Miss Mills, who gave an acquiescent nod.

"For all of my life that I can remember," the low, tranquil voice repeated, "I have been called Ida Holmes Campbell. This is not my real name, but was given me by the dear woman who adopted me, and who brought me up to live a life of usefulness and duty."

The coldly critical eye of James Esterbrook was on her.

His thoughts ran: "Be careful, young women. If you're going to work the line of duty and virtue, your cigarette is out of the picture."

Ida Holmes Campbell returned his glance unconcernedly and crossed her legs more comfortably.

Her gown was not especially short, but the slender ankles in their sheer black silk hose, and ribbon-tied Oxfords were an attractive sight.

"Miss Jane Campbell, who took me to live with her, was a Scotch woman, who lived, at various times, in many parts of the world. To begin the story at the beginning, I can only tell you the details as she told them,—many times,—to me."

Miss Ida Campbell took a deliberate whiff of her cigarette, looked slowly round to see how the story was being received,—her attention being entirely impersonal,—and went on.

"It seems she was traveling through New England, and when in a sleeping-car, she returned to her berth, after a trip to the dressing room, she found in it a small child, a girl of four or five years.

"Surprised beyond measure, she concluded the child belonged to a fellow passenger and had been placed by nurse or mother in her berth by mistake.

"She soothed the little one to sleep and awaited the return of its guardian. But no one ever claimed the child, and Miss Campbell was forced to the opinion that the baby had been abandoned and given over to her purposely. She was pleased rather than otherwise at the gift, for she took to the little girl at once; but being conscientious and deeming it her duty, she advertised, even employed detectives, to find out where the child belonged,—but all to no avail. She could learn no facts of the baby's birth or parentage, and after a long and futile endeavor she gave up the search and accepted the child as her own. Adoption was impossible, for lack of data, but as long as she lived she acted the part of a wise and loving mother to her foundling.

"I am that girl, and I claim that I am also Angela Howland."

"Upon what do you base such an extraordinary claim?" asked Esterbrook, coldly. He was interested,—deeply interested in this fascinating girl,—but so far, had no confidence in her sincerity. It was his duty to protect the interests of his clients, and as yet, they seemed to him in no jeopardy.

Yet, after all, there was something about this young woman, this very up-to-date, cigarette-smoking personality that inspired a sort of confidence, born, perhaps, of her own cocksure attitude.

"My claims are not many,—and not all tangible,"

she said, and the earnest look she gave the lawyer made him listen attentively. "Here is one," and she took from her handbag a string of coral.

"I claim that is the coral necklace that Angela Howland wore when she was—when she disappeared."

"You know the details of the child's burial,—of her disappearance?"

"I do. I tell you I am that child."

"You recollect—you remember—"

"Nothing. I was a mere baby—"

"Five years old," put in Leonard Swift, savagely. "I say, Mr. Esterbrook, I refuse to listen to any more of this harangue! Are you being hypnotized —or what?"

Somewhat in the way that a human gaze is said to quell the ferocity of a wild animal, Miss Campbell's slightly ironic smile silenced Leonard Swift. It was only a little smile, but it gave him to feel that he would better listen to the rest of this egregious fabrication.

"Granting for a moment that you are Angela Howland," Esterbrook said, still coldly, "you know that you were supposed dead, and that you were placed in a casket for burial?"

"I know that." The girl's eyes were solemn.

"How did you get out?"

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"You remember nothing of it?"

"Nothing."

"Then, how do you know that Angela Howland

was supposed dead, and that, later, her body, alive or dead, was taken from its casket?"

"I know that,—from,—from reading it in the papers,—recently."

"And you were clever enough to plan from that a scheme to impersonate that child, and to come here with a trumpery string of corals that you bought for the purpose, and you—"

Leonard Swift's rage fairly choked him, and he couldn't go on.

"You are so angry, sir, I think you must fear my story is true."

Again that faint glimmer of a smile, and Swift again writhed under it.

But this incensed Edith Mills, who was quick to resent anything that annoyed or hurt the present master of Howlands.

"Your story is so well rehearsed, and you tell it so glibly, that it sounds far from true!" Miss Mills exclaimed.

And then the visitor favored *her* with one of those glances, that, ever so slightly tinged with amusement, seemed to render their object absurd.

"Go on," the lawyer ordered, and Austin Magee, listening quietly, wondered if this could be the true Angela.

"Miss Jane Campbell kept the necklace that she took from the throat of her foundling, and she also kept the clothing,—but that I have not with me."

"Couldn't buy that as easily as corals," sneered Swift.

"Where is that clothing?" asked Esterbrook.

"In Australia."

"Too bad it's so far away." The lawyer spoke with sarcasm. "It would be a strong proof,—which, I can hardly say the corals are."

"Yes? But as you know there has been no mention of the coral necklace in the newspaper stories. Why should I go and buy such a thing?"

Esterbrook considered. That was so. Indeed, he himself had never heard of the corals. If it could be proved that the little Angela was buried wearing them, it was indeed a point. But far from conclusive.

"Go on," he said again.

"I lived with Miss Campbell in Australia, in England and in France. Soon after the war my adopted mother died. Partly in the hope of learning my real parentage, and partly because I had a good position offered me, I came to America two years ago, and I have lived in New York City since."

"Yes? We are not particularly interested in your career," Swift said. He had curbed his anger, and now spoke cuttingly. "But we will listen to your claim,—you haven't made any real one as yet,—and then we will answer it, and—dismiss it."

"You may be interested to learn how I happened to know of the fact that Angela Howland was being sought for." And now, the light in the girl's eyes, the lovely smile that lighted up the little face, held every one spellbound.

"It was through my dentist." Austin Magee gave

a start. "He is a Doctor Prescott, in New York, and he had seen in the Dental Journals an advertisement that attracted his notice. It was a reward offered for the discovery of a missing girl. The peculiarity of her teeth was that the two front teeth were quite widely separated."

A sudden, intentional disclosure of Miss Campbell's small white teeth showed the upper front ones so separated.

The reddened lips came together again, and the voice went on:

"Dentists were urged to inquire of their patients who showed this peculiarity as to their ancestry, and if any were learned to be in doubt as to their parentage they were asked to communicate with Mr. Howland.

"Doctor Prescott had several who had separated front teeth, but of them all, I was the only one who could qualify otherwise."

"And you snatched at the opportunity!" Swift's voice rang out. "Well, you can't put it over. See?"

"Be quiet, Swift," said the lawyer, losing patience with the angry man. "Let us hear this out."

"Yes, I snatched at the opportunity,"—the smile made the words acceptable,—"and I wrote to Mr. Howland."

"You had an answer?" the lawyer spoke gravely.

"My letter was answered by Mr. Magee. He told me that Mr. Howland died the same day my letter was received."

"That night," Magee corrected. "I had the letter

from this young lady that day. I told Mr. Howland about it that evening,—as we sat here in the library. He was, of course, deeply interested and directed that I should follow up the matter. He had ordered those advertisements put in the dentists' papers some time before. We had had a few other replies, but they all came to naught."

"As this would have done had Ralph Howland lived,—and as it must do anyway," Swift declared.

"I don't quite understand," Esterbrook said; "why was the advertisement advisable?"

Austin Magee answered him.

"Ever since Mr. Howland learned of this disappearance of the child from the casket he was obsessed with the idea that she might be alive. He devised many ingenious methods of search, he employed the cleverest detectives, both he and I racked our brains for chance efforts. Then one day, he remembered that the baby's teeth were separated, and that this was an inherited peculiarity. As we all know, Mrs. Howland's teeth are like that, and her mother's were the same. It is an inheritable condition, and though a slight hope, Mr. Howland eagerly tried it. His plan was to interview every possible young girl in the country, who could be reached through the dentists, and who had the sort of teeth described. The advertisement has been running nearly a year, and now perhaps it has succeeded."

"Succeeded!" Swift cried. "I should say not! It is a clever dodge, I grant that, but there is not

a word of truth in it! There are thousands of girls in this country with front teeth that do not join, are they all to be accepted as missing heirs of Ralph Howland?"

"There are not so many," Miss Campbell's quiet look silenced him for the moment. "Doctor Prescott has several such patients, but not many, and no others of my age. While it is not a rare condition, at the same time it is not a common one,—as you can all affirm by running over your list of acquaintances. How many have separated front teeth?"

There was a moment's silence, and the lawyer nodded his head. "That is so. I can think of no one at the moment, except Mrs. Howland."

"I only know of two others," said Austin Magee.

"You're in this plot," Swift accused him. "You think you can put it over because Ralph Howland is not here and Mrs. Howland is not competent. But you can't do it! I'll fight it to a finish!"

"Do be quiet, Swift," Esterbrook admonished him. "There's no question of a fight as yet. This matter has gone far enough to demand careful consideration. Now as the present head of the house of Howlands, please have a little more dignity and wisdom. I think, Miss Campbell,—for I will call you by your accustomed name,—I think I must ask you to answer a few definite questions."

"Yes, sir." The girl took another cigarette from her case, tapped the end of it absent-mindedly on the back of her hand, and then suddenly replaced it, and sat bolt upright.

"I think," she said, "that instead of questions, you would get at the truth quicker if you let me meet my mother. I think her reception and recognition of her own child would set your doubts at rest."

"You do not understand," Esterbrook spoke gently, "Mrs. Howland is really ill,—not so much physically as mentally."

"The sight of me will cure her."

Edith Mills stared. A grudging admiration for this insistent personality filled her soul. She had thought that she, herself, was authoritative, dominating,—but she now felt less so than this straight little wisp of femininity.

"But an interview could not take place without her physician's sanction. You see, her reason hangs in the balance. A sudden shock might unseat it entirely and permanently."

"Is she—isn't she—sane?"

A look of fear in the anxious eyes gave Esterbrook the impression that she was afraid her great plan would fail.

"Yes,—that is, she understands and responds to simple mental matters,—but she is incapable of concentrated thought, or logical argument."

"The sight of me would restore her mind," said the obstinate red lips. "Will you not try it?"

She spoke cajolingly, but Esterbrook steeled his heart against blandishment.

"Why did you leave such important evidence as the little garments in Australia?" he asked.

"When we left there it was at the beginning of

the war. Miss Campbell desired to give her services as a nurse in France. We were there for four years, working in a Field Hospital. Miss Campbell did wonderful work. She had many medals and recognitions given her."

"You worked with her?"

"Of course. I did what I could. Then, when she died, I wanted to go back to Australia to get the belongings we had left there. But I couldn't manage to go,—and having opportunity to come to the States, I came."

"In what position?"

"I met an American family who were traveling in France. They asked me to come back here with them as governess to their two little children. I have been with them over a year,—I still hold the position."

"They know of this—er—claim of yours?"

"No; I have not told them. I thought it wiser not to. But Mr. Esterbrook, I rest my claim on recognition by my mother,—or nurse. I learned,—also, from the newspaper reports,—that the nurse who took care of little Angela Howland is still here. She will know me."

"That will settle it, certainly," said Esterbrook. "Miss Mills, won't you bring Nurse Lane here?"

CHAPTER VIII

The Mother Instinct

MISS MILLS returned with Nurse Lane. No inkling of the matter under consideration had been given to Lane, and as she entered the room in her stolid, heavy way, she glanced carelessly at the men there, and gave a look of little more interest to the strange girl who was present.

"What is it?" she asked, addressing herself to Leonard Swift, who had been at some pains to teach her that he was the head of the house.

"Do you know this young woman?" Swift said, with an indicative nod in the direction of Ida Holmes Campbell.

"No, sir, I do not," Lane returned, after a brief scrutiny.

"Oh, Nurse, you do," the girl exclaimed, in her soft, insinuating voice. "I'm your little, lost Angela."

"Not you!" Lane was almost contemptuous. "What do you mean by such talk?"

"That's enough," Swift returned. "If Nurse Lane does not recognize her—"

"But give the girl a chance," interrupted the law-

yer. "After all these years, the nurse would probably not recognize the girl at a glance, but there may be certain points—"

"You remember my oddly placed front teeth, don't you, Nurse?"

Again the red lips were parted in an exhibition of the separated teeth.

"I remember that baby Angela had teeth a bit apart, like her mother before her. But that's nothing,—many people have such. Why should I think this girl is my baby that is dead? My baby,—that I saw in her little white casket!"

"But you have been told the story? You know the child was taken out of the casket?"

"Yes, Doctor Avery told me about it." The woman was very grave. "But I saw that baby dead, —and she never came to life again. Some awful creatures may have taken that little body from its coffin, but it was a dead body."

"No, Nurse," the girl spoke softly, almost in a whisper, "no, Nurse Lane, it was not a dead body, —it was the little living Angela, and I am that child. Grown up now, but the same little child you used to care for."

Lane took a step nearer the speaker.

She took the girl's face in her gaunt, wrinkled hands, and looked long and earnestly into the brown eyes.

"No," she said at last, "no, you are not Angela Howland,—and what's more you know you are not. I see the lies in your face."

Turning on her heel, Lane left the room.

There was a dead silence, even Swift said no word.

Then the girl spoke.

"That woman does not *want* me to be Angela Howland. I do not know why, but she doesn't. She is insincere, and she did *not* read falsehood in my eyes! She is a strange person,—and, she is not to be trusted."

"That line of talk won't get you anywhere, Miss Campbell," Swift said, less rudely than jocularly. He was no longer afraid of this girl, or of her claim to the estate he considered his own. He knew Nurse Lane's words carried weight and it would be difficult to persuade anybody to differ from her decision.

Miss Campbell looked round the room. Was no one her friend?

Austin Magee looked at her with a steady regard, but said nothing.

Edith Mills' expression was clearly hostile, and Swift was openly laughing at her.

But James Esterbrook said, "I told you you should have a just hearing, Miss Campbell, and I shall do all I can to bring it about. I approve of your meeting Mrs. Howland. If she recognizes you as her child, it can have only a good effect on her. If she does not, surely there can be no harm done. If you will wait, I will send for Doctor Avery, and ask his permission for the meeting."

"Please," said the girl, and then, without another word, she turned to the books on the table, selected

one, and going over to a chair in the farthest corner of the room, sat down to read, with apparent unconcern.

There was an embarrassed silence. Embarrassing, that is, to all except this queer girl, this astonishing claimant to a place in the household of Howlands. She sat, seemingly oblivious of the others, turning the pages of her book with quiet regularity, either absorbed in it or pretending to be so.

There was a little desultory conversation, but almost any remark seemed perfunctory, and the talk could not be casual with that listener so pervadingly present.

"Here he comes," Miss Campbell herself announced, as the Avery motor car approached the house.

And in another moment Doctor Avery was in the room with them all.

"Good day, Doctor Avery," Leonard Swift greeted him, and at once presenting the girl, he said, "I will introduce this young lady as Miss Ida Campbell, though she claims that is not her real name."

Doctor Avery looked at the girl sharply, for intuition gave him a hint of what was to come.

"Yes, and what *is* your name, may I ask?"

"Angela Howland," the red lips replied, and a soft little hand was slipped into the doctor's great, capable paw.

Surprised not so much at the statement as the assured air of the speaker, Doctor Avery held the

girl's hand while he closely scrutinized her countenance.

"You do not resemble either Mr. or Mrs. Ralph Howland," he said, at last. "Do you mean that you are their daughter, Angela?"

"Yes; I was the child who was thought to have died of the sleeping sickness."

"Indeed." The doctor was plainly incredulous, yet still open-minded. "Will you tell me your history?"

"So far as I know it," and a pretty smile disclosed the white front teeth, which this strange girl seemed to consider her passport to happiness.

By this time they were seated, the doctor having cannily placed Miss Campbell where a strong light fell on her face.

But apparently even the fierce light that beats upon a throne could not embarrass this self-possessed person, and she met his curious gaze and his inquiries with equal composure.

"My earliest memories," the low, steady voice began, "are of my childhood days in Australia. I lived with Miss Jane Campbell, a middle-aged spinster, whom I called Auntie. She was very good to me, and I was a happy and contented little girl. I was properly educated, and when I grew old enough to understand, she told me how I had come to her."

"And of all poppycock stories, it is the most ridiculous one I ever heard!" Swift burst forth.

"I'd like to hear it, then," and the good doctor smiled kindly at the narrator.

Encouragement was not needed, however, and without a glance at the supercilious Swift, the girl continued:

"She told me that one time she was traveling on some railway in New England, and during the night, while she was absent from her own berth, some one placed in it a child of four or five years old. A baby girl, with golden curls and brown eyes. She assumed the baby had been put there by mistake for some near-by berth and waited for the mother to claim her child. But no one did so. In the morning, neither conductor nor porter could give her any light on the subject, and, on reaching New York, she found herself in undisputed possession of the little one.

"She then concluded that the child had been purposely abandoned and had been given to her to keep. She assumed the mother or perhaps a father or other guardian had been on the train and had watched her actions with the baby. As her ministrations had been only of the kindest and pleasantest description, she came to the conclusion that, satisfied the child was in good hands, it was left to be hers.

"Miss Campbell was not averse to keeping the baby, indeed, she loved her at once, but she wanted a legal right to her,—and, too, she was by no means sure that her solution of the mystery was the right one.

"So she tried every means to learn the truth. She watched for news in the papers of a lost or kid-

napped child, but there was none. She advertised herself, guardedly, for the parents of the baby. At last, she put the case in the hands of a private detective, but no inkling of the truth could be learned."

"H'm," said the doctor. "On what railroad was she traveling and near what station did she acquire this remarkable gift?"

A quick flash of her eyes to his, showed that the girl quite appreciated the doubt and distrust in his tones.

"She didn't know," was the quiet reply. "That is, she knew the railroad, it was the New York Central, but she knew none of the station stops."

"Perhaps she knew the hour,—you see, I am trying to ascertain if that baby could have been put on the train at Normandale. If not, it couldn't have been Angela Howland."

"Couldn't have been, anyway," growled Swift, and Lawyer Esterbrook, who was listening attentively, shook his head hard.

"Go on," said the doctor, and his inscrutable face was at least kindly tolerant.

"Miss Campbell finally went back to her home in Australia, taking the child. We lived there for years, and during the war, Miss Campbell wanted greatly to help. She was a most wonderful woman, a grand, big-hearted one, and she went to France and served in a Field Hospital. I went, too, as a nurse, and we were there till the end of the war. It was in performance of her duties that Miss Campbell had an injury that resulted in her death, two years ago.

"She left me her property, which, however, was not enough for me to live on, so I have now a position as governess in a New York family."

"All very interesting," Swift said, "but let us get to the point. Your life history is of little importance unless we consider your claim."

"The point is," and the girl looked into the eyes of the puzzled physician, "that I believe myself to be Angela Howland. I believe somebody discovered that the child in the casket was not dead, and for some reason, mistaken or intentional, placed me on that train, which certainly went through Normandale."

"Through trains don't stop here," said James Esterbrook, "but go on, Miss Campbell."

"At least, you have no reason to doubt the story Miss Jane Campbell told of finding me!" and the brown eyes flashed.

"Pardon me," said the lawyer, "I think we have no especial reason to believe it. I should say it's a pretty hard tale to believe."

"But why would she make up such a yarn?" cried the girl.

"She didn't,—you did!" declared Swift, bluntly.

"Oh, I didn't!" and two little hands clasped themselves in earnestness. "It is just what Miss Campbell told me. It would be absurd to make up such a—"

"It *is* absurd," Doctor Avery murmured, "it is absurd,—and yet—"

He peered into her face.

"Oh, do see a likeness, doctor!" she cried; "do see a resemblance to my father or mother,—for I am sure—*sure* I am Angela. Look at my teeth,—it was through that peculiarity that I found my way here."

"Yes," Austin Magee corroborated, "Mr. Howland, in his anxiety to find his daughter, tried to trace her through the Dentists' Journals, and I conducted the search. It is true that this young lady's teeth are separated, like Mrs. Howland's."

"And like Mary Howland's mother before her," mused the doctor. "Also the eye teeth are small and sharp,—truly, there is a remarkable resemblance, yet, that is not enough. I see no—or, almost no,—likeness in the face."

Again he stared at the girl, eagerly, as if anxious to find the truth.

"But there are other proofs," she urged. "I have the string of coral that I wore when—when I was—oh, you know! and the little garments that I wore when Miss Campbell found me are still carefully kept."

"Where?"

"They are in storage, with Miss Campbell's belongings, in Australia."

"H'm,—pretty far away!"

"Good idea, selecting Australia as the scene of your fairy story," Swift said. His whole attitude was that of unbelief, but he also had an impatient air, as of one who wants to end a farce and have done with it.

"Yes; but they can be procured, though it will take time," the girl's eyes were wistful.

"Nurse Lane doesn't recognize her," put in Edith Mills, who was thrilled by the dramatic situation and greatly desired to take part in the controversy.

"No?" asked Doctor Avery, his face falling. "That's against it, then. I don't recognize her myself, but I am willing to admit a possibility,—that's all I can say, a possibility. Seems to me the story is a straightforward one and could be true."

"How could it be true?" asked Esterbrook. "Who in the world could get that baby out of her coffin and into a train in the middle of the night? Preposterous!"

"But," said Avery, "somebody did take that child out of that coffin. She couldn't get out herself,—even granting that she woke from what I thought was the sleep of death. It is positive that the casket was empty when it was interred. Now, somebody was instrumental in getting the body out, dead or alive. So why denounce this girl as an impostor until we know more about it?"

"But," said Swift, "even if that did happen, if somebody took the child from the casket, it was far more likely that there was merely a shifting of the little bodies. Stryker told me there were as many as five or six children's bodies in his rooms at once during that epidemic. For some reason or other, the bodies may have been changed about, or what is more likely, the wrong casket was attributed to Angela Howland, her nameplate put on an empty

one by mistake, and the real Angela buried somewhere else, with another nameplate."

Esterbrook nodded his head. "That's doubtless the truth," he said. "Much more believable than this trumped-up yarn. No, Miss Campbell, it's ingenious, but we'll have to have far more definite and conclusive proof than any you've yet offered."

"You can have it," and the girl spoke very quietly, but to an attentive ear or eye, it was evident that she was about to play her trump card. "Let me be taken to my mother."

"It is the only thing to do," and Doctor Avery rose at once. "It will be a final test. Mary Howland's mind is disordered, but only to a slight degree. It is her memory that is affected rather than her reasoning powers. Therefore, she may *not* remember her daughter, but I hold that her recognition would be a very strong argument in favor of this girl's claim."

The girl said nothing, but her eyes glinted with a suppressed eagerness as she looked from one to another.

Esterbrook nodded in favor of the plan. Austin Magee was noncommittal, and indeed his opinion was not sought.

Nor was that of Edith Mills, but careless of that, she cried out, "Splendid! That will settle it, of course. For no matter what is the state of Mrs. Howland's brain, she would recognize her own daughter!"

"Maybe not," said Doctor Avery cautiously;

"Nurse Lane didn't,—and suppose Miss Campbell's story is true, suppose she is really Angela Howland, it is quite possible,—even likely, that Mrs. Howland will repudiate her."

"I'll take the chance," said the claimant, quietly. "Only make the experiment. If Mrs. Howland denies relationship, I shall make no further effort to establish my claim. That is, unless you, who have heard my story already believe it."

"Then let us go and try the case at once," said the doctor. "We can't all go. I will take Miss Campbell to Mrs. Howland's room; you, Esterbrook follow, but remain in the hall, so you can hear and see, but your presence must not distract Mrs. Howland's attention."

"I want more witnesses than that," Swift decreed. "If I'm to be supplanted, it shan't be through any put up job on the part of you—"

"Miss Mills, you accompany us," Doctor Avery said, quietly, ignoring Swift's implications. "You can report exactly as to Mrs. Howland's behavior and your presence will not surprise her."

So the ones designated went upstairs, and Swift and Magee remained in the library.

"Did you ever hear such a barefaced deception?" Swift exploded. "The nerve of that girl!"

Magee said nothing, but he looked contemplatively at Swift.

"Don't look like that,—as if you half believed it!" Swift stormed. "I dare say you have been sincere in your search, and that it was done at Ralph's orders,

but by heavens, if this ridiculous girl puts this thing over, I'll take it out of you, somehow!"

"Don't threaten, Swift,—I had no hand in it, beyond carrying out Mr. Howland's plans."

"You say you didn't—" but Magee deliberately walked out of the room, and Leonard Swift was left to fume by himself.

Perhaps he was not unreasonable. For a man of his ambitions to fall heir to an immense property and then to have his ownership of it jeopardized by such a flimsy pretense at a claim as this girl was putting up was enough to dismay him.

Upstairs, a parley ensued between Doctor Avery and Nurse Lane.

"No, sir, I won't let Mrs. Howland be upset by this absurd thing. I tell you, I won't allow it!"

"Since when is your authority greater than mine?" asked the doctor, amazed at Lane's stubbornness.

"It isn't in some things,—not if Mrs. Howland needs your advice or services. But she doesn't, and I tell you she's mighty unsettled in her mind to-day, and a shock like that—"

"Hush, Nurse,—and get out of the way, we're going in."

With a gentle but firm hand, Avery grasped her arm and urged her aside. Then, stepping back himself, he directed Miss Campbell to go to his patient.

Mary Howland sat quietly by a window, looking out on the lawn and gardens, now bereft of blossoms, but still beautiful with their blue spruces and

golden cedars. Robed in a white negligee of soft crêpe, she twirled its tassels idly, turning her head as the sound of voices arose.

Ida Campbell went toward her and, pausing in front of her, sank down on one knee, and, taking the thin white hands in her own, she said, softly:

"Mother, I've come home. I'm Angela."

The watchers saw Mary Howland turn her eyes to the girl's face, saw the expression of those eyes change successively from blank inquiry to surprise, to wonder, to delight.

"My Angela? my baby? my daughter?" she said, and her face moved nearer to that of the supplicating girl.

"Yes, your baby, grown now to be a great girl,—but still your baby,—*mother.*"

With a cry of ecstatic joy, Mary Howland drew the girl into her arms and held the bowed head against her hungry mother heart.

"What does it mean?" she asked, in her most rational of tones.

"Is that your daughter, Mary?" asked Doctor Avery, nonplused at the way things were going. Was his patient sane enough to decide this question?

"Yes,—this is Angela,—my little Angela,—she says so," and Mrs. Howland clasped the girl closer as if she feared to lose her. "But I do not understand—my baby died—"

"No, mother,—no, I didn't die,—it was a mistake,—I was only asleep. And for long years I couldn't find you,—and now, here I am."

CHAPTER IX

The Coral Necklace

THE listeners were differently affected by the scene.

Doctor Avery, friend even more than physician to Mary Howland, was ready and willing to take the mother's recognition as proof positive.

"And," the good man thought to himself, "even though she isn't really Angela, if Mary thinks she is, it may do her a whole lot of good, and where can be the harm?"

Nurse Lane, however, was far from this way of thinking.

"You've no right," she told the doctor, "to impose on my poor lamb. That's never her baby,—and you know it. That girl's a born trickster, I can read her wicked little face! She somehow hatched this plan, and she's cute enough to carry it through. But she must not be allowed to do it."

Ida Campbell looked at the nurse, who was at no pains to lower her voice, as she made known her opinions.

"If mother knows me," the girl said, calmly, "I don't think it matters whether Nurse does or not. I am here to stay,—Lane can go or remain as she chooses."

Lane gasped. This,—to her,—from an upstart, an impostor! It was unbelievable!

"I will go," she said, tossing her head in dudgeon. "If this chit remains here, I will go."

"Oh, now, Nursie, don't decide too soon," the girl smiled gayly at her. "There's time enough to change your mind about me. Really, I'm not half a bad sort,—once you know me."

"Don't be too sure about this matter, Miss Campbell," the lawyer said, speaking very seriously. "The fact that a woman who is not responsible accepts your word, does not make us, who have reasoning minds, do so."

"What are you going to do about it?" and the glinting eyes turned full on him.

"We're going to have a conference,—where your presence will be required, and we're going to get at the truth of your strange story. If we conclude that it may be true, we will then take up the question of your claim, but if we prove it false, there will be no place for you at Howlands."

"Don't take her away," cried Mary Howland, as Doctor Avery rose and beckoned the girl to accompany him.

"Just for a little while," the doctor soothed her. "She will come back soon."

"No, no! I won't let her go. She is mine,—my baby, grown up to a lovely girl,—oh, Angela dear, how pretty you are!"

The mother caressed the hand she still held, and the close observation of the physician showed him

no untoward symptoms on the part of his patient. On the contrary the look in Mary Howland's eyes was more nearly normal, more evidently sane than it had been since her husband's death.

But it proved an impossible task to take the girl away.

Indeed, the insistence made Mary so nervously excited and so agitated that Avery decreed they must stay together for the present.

"Have the conference up here, or take the two down to the library," he directed. "But whoever or whatever this girl is, she has done a lot already for Mrs. Howland, and I insist on their remaining together for a time."

So all went down to the library, and the men talked together quite as if the principals in this strange drama were not present.

"First," the lawyer said, speaking to the group generally, but especially to Leonard Swift, who was of course the one most affected by the outcome of the situation, "I want to say that the whole story this girl tells *may* be true. For, knowing that the casket supposed to contain the Howland child's body was buried empty, the probability is that the child was taken from it,—either dead or alive. It seems to me, that if the baby came to life,—or, rather, awoke from the sleep of disease, that she would make some faint sound or stir, and any one hearing it would certainly open the casket. I think it quite possible that this occurred on the train. The casket was shipped to New York, *en route* for New Jersey.

Suppose that while in the express car, the awakening came,—suppose a brakeman or train-hand released the little girl, it is within the possibilities that he put her in a berth in the sleeper."

"Not likely," said Doctor Avery, frowning in his deep thought, "but—oh, well, I suppose it is possible."

"Why in the world would he do that?" spoke up Edith Mills, who was enthralled with interest. "Why not tell the conductor,—or some one?"

"They're a queer set, those ignorant trainmen," the doctor said; "I've had to do with them. I really believe if that had happened, an ignorant, frightened, perhaps superstitious man might have done such a thing."

"Never!" declared Swift. "There's no use trying to make up fantastic possibilities to fit a trumped-up story. The casket was buried empty because in the hurry Angela's nameplate was put on the wrong one,—an empty one, and it was sent off with the others. The real body of the child being, of course, in some other casket,—that may have been sent elsewhere."

"Mr. Howland took that idea into consideration," said Magee, "and he concluded it was not likely, as he himself was present when the nameplate was affixed."

"Might have been a mistake, all the same," Swift insisted.

"We can't tackle the problem from that end," Esterbrook declared. "What we have to do is to

prove or disprove the identity of Miss Campbell,—to prove or disprove her claim to be Angela Howland."

"Why was the name of Ida Holmes given you?" Miss Mills asked. She had rather a talent for asking pertinent questions.

For the first time the visitor looked disconcerted.

"That is a point against me," she said, but her brave little face was determined in its expression. She sat by Mary Howland, who was quiet and contented so long as the girl was by her. The sad eyes of the older woman, brightened a little by this new interest, traveled often over the face and figure of the girl, and each time Mary Howland nodded contentedly. Doctor Avery watched her and could form no opinion as to whether she really recognized her child, or was merely swayed by her desire to do so.

"When Miss Campbell first saw me she asked my name."

"You remember this?" asked the doctor.

"Not at all. I have no recollections of my first five years of life. Indeed, I remember nothing clearly until I was about six, living in Melbourne."

"Yet, according to your story, you told your name to the lady who befriended you?"

"She told me I did," was the quiet reply. "She said that when she asked my name I replied 'Ida Holmes' or 'Ida Holm.' Repeatedly she asked me but I always gave the same answer. In fact, she said, I said little else. Whatever she asked, I re-

sponded 'Ida Holmes.' So she named me Ida Holmes Campbell."

"With a name as definite as that she should have been able to trace your parents," said Miss Mills.

"She tried. She wrote to or went to see everybody by the name of Holm or Holmes that she could find. But she could learn nothing, so at last she concluded that I had been purposely left with her."

"Of course," Esterbrook said, "no amount of advertising a lost child would lead to any information from the Howlands, for they supposed their child dead."

"Of course," Avery agreed, "but I am willing to acknowledge that it is quite possible to believe a child dead with that treacherous deceptive disease when the child is only in a comatose sleep."

"Granted all that," Leonard Swift said, impatiently, "that doesn't go far toward proving that Miss Campbell is the Howland child."

"My mother's love proves that," and a glance of affection passed between the two.

"Well, I've got to go," said Doctor Avery, looking at his watch. "I don't know what you're going to do about all this, but I prescribe for my patient a few days at least of the society of this young lady. Whether she is Mary Howland's daughter or not, she has a splendid effect on her. I've been watching, and I can tell you that this whole episode, however it turns out, will make,—has already made,—a change for the better in Mrs. Howland's condition. If she improves as rapidly as I anticipate, she

will get so much better that her ideas and opinions will be sane and worthy of consideration,—though they are not quite that at present."

The truth of the doctor's words could be seen by the least observant. A steadier light shone in Mrs. Howland's eyes, a more rational tone pervaded her utterances, and a real mother smile came now and then to her pale lips.

But Nurse Lane was evidently disturbed over something.

"Ida Holmes," she repeated, half aloud. "Ida Holm. Oh, if it should be!"

"Did you ever know any one named that?" asked Edith Mills, whose acute hearing had caught the words.

"No," and Lane glared at her, "I never did!"

"It couldn't have been my name!" Miss Campbell laughed, "but it may be I called myself that, as kiddies often assume names."

Again Lane gave a start and stared at the speaker. Then, shutting her thin lips in a straight line, she shook her head obstinately and said nothing.

Leonard Swift spoke.

"Miss Campbell, I want it distinctly understood that not only do I believe your story in no particular, but I also believe that it is pure fabrication on your part. I believe that you ingeniously planned it after reading of Mr. Howland's death in the papers, and after learning from your dentist that your teeth might prove a factor in your favor. I say this to

you plainly, for I want you to know just where I stand. Also, had I my way, I should ask you to leave Howlands and never appear here again. But since Doctor Avery has decreed that you shall stay with Mrs. Howland for a few days, I cannot forbid it. And, I shall take the opportunity while you are here to prove your story false in every important particular, and to prove you an intentional impostor."

Swift's words were so coldly spoken, so positively meant, that Ida Campbell gasped.

Then, giving him cold glance for cold glance, she said, "I am not surprised at your attitude, Mr. Swift, for I see you resent my intrusion on what you look on as your own rights. However, I accept your unwilling invitation to stay here for a time, and I shall do all I can to further the good doctor's plans for restoring my—my mother's health and reason. Furthermore, I shall welcome your investigation of my story, knowing that every probe you make can strike only the truth."

A smart little nod of her head in Swift's direction finished this speech, and then the girl turned to Mary Howland, saying, "Shall we go for a little stroll on the sun porch, dear?"

It was not surprising that Mary Howland welcomed the companionship of this bright young thing. She was so alert and alive, so quick to respond to impressions, so volatile as to seem almost electric, and her eager, avid little face showed perception and ready understanding.

She had a charming little air of expectancy, gave the impression of standing, tiptoe, on the verge of some new and thrilling interest or excitement. Her walk was quick, yet full of rhythm. Truly, she was:

"A dancing shape, an image gay,
To haunt, to startle, to waylay."

Mother and daughter, as they now called one another, went away together, and the men resumed their discussion.

"We have very serious questions to consider," Esterbrook began, "and I don't know just where we're coming out. I am convinced that the circumstances of the death of Mr. Howland are,—at least, mysterious, and they must be looked into. We *must* find out what happened in this room the night of his death. I don't think the detectives at work on the case will ever make much headway, and I advise a special detective. Then he can also investigate the claim of this girl."

"I will investigate that myself," Leonard Swift declared. He seemed full of a new resolve and spoke with energy. "You know, Esterbrook, if that girl really was Angela Howland, I shouldn't say a word, but merely surrender all claims of my own to the Howland property. But I know she is a fraud, a willful and wicked impostor. And I'm going to prove it. I think I see through the whole scheme, but I don't want to explain this until I can take a run down to New York and interview those people she has been living with."

"I've seen them," said Magee, "and they can tell nothing of her before she went to them."

"No?" and Swift's glance was supercilious. "Perhaps I can learn something from them. Anyway, I mean to try. Now, Esterbrook, you go ahead with the investigation of Ralph's death. I think myself there's no real mystery about it,—I think it was a sort of stroke,—but since the doctors raise a question, you must do all you can to learn the truth. I'm going to start right in on this matter of the Campbell girl, and I shall go to New York to-morrow. Then we'll see what we shall see."

"If you find out anything," the lawyer said, "it may help us in our other detective work. For it would not surprise me to learn that this impersonation of Angela Howland is part of a deep laid plot that also involves the murder of Ralph Howland."

"Murder!" Magee exclaimed, "how could he have been murdered?"

"It's within the possibilities," Esterbrook asserted. "I don't see just how, myself, but it is dawning on me that if he *was* murdered, the sudden appearance of a new heir to his property is part of the crime plot."

"I don't believe that pretty little girl is a criminal," and Edith Mills shook her decided head.

"She may be merely an instrument in the hands of wily men. She may have been selected to play this part, because of her teeth, and her pretty manners and attractive effects. But not for a minute do I believe she is really the Howland child."

"Nor I," agreed Swift. "Yet I can't think she planned the scheme. There's a master mind behind her that arranged every detail. But I'll know more when I get back from New York than I do now."

Of course, owing to the doctor's orders that Miss Campbell, as she was called by all but Mary Howland, should remain at the house for a few days, the girl was domiciled there. She was given the room that Sally Peters had occupied, and she telephoned to her employers in New York, asking that a suitcase of her clothing be despatched to her at once.

To say she made herself at home would be putting it mildly. She fairly melted into the family and fitted into her niche as if she really belonged.

No one could help liking her, yet no one believed in her.

Except for Mrs. Howland, every one held the strongest doubt as to her identity.

"She may be the right one," Magee said to the lawyer. "I can't help thinking there are arguments in her favor."

"Not arguments," said the other; "but there is a possibility. If the Howland baby left that casket alive, there's a chance that this is the girl. And I will say that once in a while I catch a fleeting smile on her face that reminds me of Mr. Howland."

"I can't see any resemblance," Magee said, thoughtfully, "but I've sometimes noticed a tone or inflection of her voice that sounded like Mr. Howland."

"Nonsense!" and Edith Mills flouted their ideas, "there's no resemblance at all. But that's no argument, either. I'm not the least mite like my mother or father either. Lots of people aren't."

"What do you think of her, Edith?" Swift asked, suddenly.

The big gray eyes looked at him, and into their depths came a hint of fear. Was he interested in the girl in spite of his scorn of her?

Edith Mills' heart seemed to stand still. Determined herself to capture Swift, if she could, she was instantly jealous of his possible interest in this new beauty.

"She's all right," she said, at last, for she was far too canny to disparage another girl. "Pretty and all that. But a terror,—if you ask me."

"I do ask you," and Esterbrook smiled. "What do you mean by a terror?"

"Oh, she's deep and treacherous and clever and—why, she'd pull the wool over the eyes of any man."

"Not over mine," and Leonard Swift looked stern. "I'm going to show her up in her true colors, and I'm going to do it quick."

The next day Swift made his trip to New York, leaving early in the morning and not returning until after dinner. By telephone he had summoned Doctor Avery and the lawyer, and by nine o'clock they were again assembled in the library.

"I have proved my case," Swift said, abruptly, "at least to my own satisfaction. I am ready to show that the girl is an impostor, but I want to tell

the details in her presence, and you can all note her actions on hearing what I have to say. Edith, go and get her, will you?"

Miss Mills left the room, and Doctor Avery said, anxiously, "Don't be too hard on her, Swift. Somehow I feel she is not the principal in this matter."

"If she isn't, I know who is," and Swift's look boded ill for the one he had in mind.

The two girls came in together. Ida, looking very lovely in a little white house gown that had arrived just in time for dinner.

A glance round the room foreboded disaster, and her smiling face grew grave.

Yet with utmost composure, she included all in a nod of greeting, then, choosing a seat, she reached across the table for a cigarette, which she lighted with deliberation. As no one spoke, she turned her glance to Leonard Swift, and said lightly, "You sent for me, Mr. Swift?"

"Yes," he said, exasperated beyond measure at her nonchalance. He would have preferred her to be in a nervous state.

"I sent for you, Miss Campbell, to tell you that I have learned all about you—"

"Good! Tell it, please, I'm sure I don't know all about myself."

"I will. I've been to see the people where you're employed as governess."

"The Harrisons. Yes?" She flicked her ash on the rug and favored Swift with a half-amused glance that irritated him very much.

"And they told me they knew nothing of you except what you had told them yourself."

"Quite true. How could they know anything more than that?"

"But I found some one who knew something, and that is the Harrisons' chauffeur."

Miss Campbell's eyes narrowed a trifle, but she said nothing.

"Your coral necklace, Miss Campbell, that you declare is the one Miss Jane Campbell took from the neck of the child she found,—where did you get it?"

"I—I brought it from Australia,—of course."

"You did nothing of the sort. You bought it in New York the day before you came up here,—the day before yesterday."

"How do you know?" the words were little more than a whisper.

"Because the Harrisons' chauffeur took you on a shopping trip. You visited three jewelry stores and from the last one you returned to the car with a small parcel. I visited those same three stores, and learned that in each one you looked at coral necklaces, asking for a particular style,—and, in the last of the three stores you bought one."

Ida Campbell's face was a study. Baffled, perplexed, despairing, she turned to Austin Magee.

"What shall I do?" she said.

"You may well ask him," Swift exclaimed. "He is in the plot, too! He visited Miss Campbell at the Harrisons several times. The plot is his as well as hers."

CHAPTER X

The Bit of Glass

ESTERBROOK looked at the girl in perplexity. Could she really be the instigator of a plot that would, if successful, put her in possession of the Howland fortune? Or, could she even be a willing aid to such a plot, if it were managed by older and more skillful hands?

She looked so far removed from all such trickery,—and yet, as the lawyer scanned her face closely, he had to admit to himself that there was an effect of sophistication, of clever ability, that might mean a power for wrongdoing as well as for right.

After her sudden appeal to Magee, Ida Campbell said nothing, but it was plain to be seen she was thinking deeply. Her eyes flew from one watching face to another; she paid little attention to Magee and finally concentrated her regard on Doctor Avery.

But Austin Magee responded to her question.

"There's but one thing to do, Miss Campbell," he said, and his tone was colorless, "tell the exact truth."

"Yes, that's the best as well as the cleverest course," said Swift, and he watched the secretary closely.

But nothing could be learned from Magee that that astute person did not choose to tell. He sat quietly, looking almost uninterested,—though Swift knew him well enough to be sure that this portended especial interest in the proceedings.

"Yes, tell the truth, Miss Campbell," urged the lawyer. "Did you buy that coral necklace in a New York shop?"

"Yes, I did," and the girl leaned a trifle forward, with an air that seemed confidential. "I did, and I'll tell you why. My story is perfectly true,—Miss Campbell did keep the necklace the baby wore, and she gave it to me,—in Australia. When we went to France I did not take it along, as we expected to go back to Melbourne. But after Miss Campbell died, I couldn't go back there alone, so I came to New York. Then, when I learned all about this matter up here, and when I became convinced that I *am* the missing Angela,—I knew I should need the necklace for proof. And, as I couldn't get it from Australia very well,—I thought it a good plan to buy one exactly like it. That's how it happened."

She sat back, with a satisfied little nod, as if she had given a perfectly satisfactory explanation of the matter.

She was in a tall-backed chair, with large carved arms, and except that her little hands gripped the carving tightly, she showed no fear or embarrassment. Her piquant face turned with a bird-like alertness from one to another.

If looking for sympathy, she must have been dis-

appointed. The lawyer regarded her coldly; Swift looked at her with contempt. Edith Mills showed active curiosity,—she had never seen a girl like this before.

Doctor Avery frowned in perplexity, yet his wise old face showed a kindly interest and honest doubt.

Austin Magee, impassive of countenance, began to speak.

"Mr. Swift charges me with being in a plot. But plot is an ill-chosen word. It is not a plot, this endeavor of mine to prove that Miss Campbell is Angela Howland. Myself, I believe she is. But it must be proved. As you know, Mr. Howland had the dentists of the whole country on the look-out for a girl with separated front teeth. While there are many such cases, not many answer to the further requirements of being about twenty years old and being ignorant of parentage and relatives. Then, when you add to this the story Miss Campbell tells of her being found, I think we must admit it all fits in too well to be mere coincidence."

"Far too well!" exclaimed Swift. "Only a preconceived and carefully worked-out plot could fit in as well as that."

"Yet it is not a plot," Magee reiterated, patiently. "Mr. Howland knew about it,—that is, he knew all I could tell him, up to the night he died,—and he directed me to go ahead and investigate it as quickly as I could. These directions I followed, even after he was no longer here to give me orders."

"And you adroitly arranged matters so it should

all seem plausible," Swift went on. "And you went to see Miss Campbell, in New York,—several times, —and between you, you fixed up this scheme—"

"I object to the words scheme or plot, and I must request you, Mr. Swift, not to use them. Yes, I did go to see Miss Campbell at the home of the Harrisons, where she is governess, and what she had to tell me was so strangely plausible and even probable that I knew she must come here and lay her claim before you. Now, it is for you, Mr. Esterbrook, to express an opinion."

"I'm sorry to say," the lawyer began, slowly, "that I can't see anything in it."

And then, at sight of the sudden consternation on the eager face of Ida Campbell, the somewhat susceptible man modified his statement.

"Yet," he continued, "there *may* be,—yes, there well may be. But how to get at it,—there's the thing! Proof? that's what we want. I thought we had it,—in the coral necklace,—but, my dear Miss Campbell, you can't expect us to take in that yarn about leaving the real one in Australia and putting over a fake one on us! You can't, now,—really!"

"But it's true," and the girl's eyes met his steadily. "It's true,—and I didn't mean exactly to fake it. I meant to tell you that this necklace I have, is—is just *like* the one in Australia. Just like it, you know. And, if you'd sum up the things in my favor,—instead of counting those against me,—you'd see what a lot there are! For I have the neck-

lace,—in Melbourne, and also the baby clothes,—which mother or nurse would recognize at once."

"Can't you get those?" asked Avery, bluntly.

"I don't see how I can,—except by going there myself. They're in a trunk, in storage. I don't suppose the storage company would let any agent get the things out,—do you?"

"An agent couldn't get the things,—because the things aren't there!" Swift said, almost brutally. "For one, I'm fed up with this foolishness! I refuse to consider this girl's claim in any way. I demand that it be dismissed and never referred to again. If Doctor Avery thinks her presence so beneficial to Mrs. Howland, let her be employed as companion or nurse,—or *adopted* as a daughter. Let Mary Howland have the girl with her in any relation she sees fit, except that of a real daughter. That I declare she is not, and I refuse to have the controversy prolonged."

"Oh, come now," Esterbrook said, "you can't toss it off that way,—it's gone too far. There are some points that must be considered. For instance, I don't believe Miss Campbell made up the whole story about her advent on the train. About Miss Jane Campbell finding her. How would she know where the incident occurred?"

"The whole story has been in all the papers," Swift said; "it was told with sufficient data for this cock-and-bull yarn to be made up. And with a little assistance from one who knew all the details," Swift

gave an indicative glance at Magee, "it was an easy matter for the girl to compose her little speech!"

"Look here, Swift," and Magee's voice was even but stern, "I've stood all of that I'm going to. I assert that all I have done in the matter of Miss Campbell's claim was done at the express and definite orders of Mr. Howland. The orders given before he died have been carried out since. The story Miss Campbell told was so spontaneous, so straightforward and so convincing that I was sufficiently impressed to believe it might be true. But, whether she is or is not Angela Howland, I must insist that Miss Campbell's story be taken in good faith and investigated with open-minded justice."

Swift said nothing, but his eyes showed a new comprehension as he looked quizzically at Magee. They said as plainly as words could do, "Bowled over!"

"Go on, Miss Campbell," Esterbrook said, in a kindly manner, "you were enumerating your claims."

"Yes; I hold that as Mr. Magee has said, the formation of my front teeth is an argument. I hold that the story told me by Miss Jane is an argument, and I hold that most of all, my mother's recognition of me, is proof positive."

"Mrs. Howland is not responsible," began Swift, but Doctor Avery interrupted. "She may not be, but that in no way interferes with her recognition of her own child. I've had wide experience and never

have I known a mother to claim as her own a child that was not hers."

"Does your experience in this particular line include mothers whose brains are affected?" Swift asked, pointedly.

And Doctor Avery was obliged to answer no.

"That strikes that out," declared Swift, triumphantly. "Oh, you people needn't all look at me as if I were over-insistent. I'm not, but I realize that this girl has you,—some of you, under a spell,—and I must look out for my rights,—or be a victim of gross injustice."

"It is justice we are seeking," the lawyer said, "and only that. Go on, Miss Campbell, is there anything further?"

"Only that, since I have known Mrs. Howland,—little more than twenty-four hours, I have been every moment more impressed with the fact that she *is* my mother. I am every moment more sure that I am her daughter,—and she feels the same."

"If the girl would say anything believable,—" Swift objected. "If she could prove anything! But this feeling of relationship—you must admit, if she is an impostor, that is the thing she would say!"

And they all saw the truth of this.

"Here's another thing," Ida blazed forth suddenly. "Nurse Lane knows me. She *knows* I am Angela. Why she denies it,—I am not sure, but I think I know. However, Nurse Lane knows I *am* Angela,—and she knows it because,"—the hazel eyes were very grave, and the scarlet lips quivered

a little,—"because she knows why I gave my name as Ida Holmes! I mean, why I gave my name when Miss Campbell first asked me, as that. Why didn't I say Angela? Or Angela Howland? No, I said Ida Holmes,—or Ida Holm. And Lane knows why."

"How do you know she does?" queried the lawyer.

"Because when she heard that part of my story, she gave a start, and she repeated the words,—she said, 'Ida Holm! If it should be!' That's what she said."

"And what do you think she meant?"

"I can't imagine"—the arched eyebrows drew themselves together—"but it must be that in play I called myself that. I know some children do. A five-year-old in the Harrison family always calls herself Jenny Wren. Children take such odd fancies. And,—if I were making up this story," the speaker shook a little pinky forefinger at the listening lawyer, "if I were making it up, do you suppose I would be so foolish as to say I told my benefactor that my name was Ida Holmes? No, if I were fabricating, I'd be a little too shrewd for that!"

She scored a point.

True enough, if she made up this whole thing, why drag in the Ida Holmes name at all?

Esterbrook voiced this point, and Swift said, shortly, "Because her name really is Ida Holmes, and she had to explain it somehow."

"Not at all," said Magee, accurately. "Granted

she has been known all her life as Ida Holmes Campbell, she would know that to say the baby foundling first used that name would militate against her being Angela Howland."

"Then, looking at it the other way," Swift took up the challenge, "if she were Angela Howland, she would have given that as her name. A child of five is old enough to tell her name."

"And that's just it," Ida cried, "I didn't,—and *I* don't know why I didn't,—but Nurse Lane knows. Ask her."

To follow this up at once, Lane was sent for.

She came, and it was easily seen she came unwillingly.

"What do you want?" she asked, ungraciously, as she came in.

"We want your testimony, Nurse," Ida said, speaking gently. "You know why the baby Angela called herself Ida Holmes—"

"She didn't! She called herself 'Andy.' That was as near as she could come to Angela. Or rather, it was what she said when she first began to talk, and the nickname stuck to her. We often called her Andy."

"Ah," said Swift, "then it would seem when Miss Campbell asked the little girl her name she would have said Andy—or Andy Howland."

"But she didn't!" Ida exclaimed, "she said Ida Holmes,—and Lane knows why! I insist upon that!"

"I know nothing about it," the woman said, sul-

lenly. But she dropped her eyes and was obviously embarrassed.

"You do," and Ida spoke accusingly. "Look me in the eyes, Nurse, and tell me you don't know what that name means."

Nurse Lane raised her eyes to meet the steady gaze of the girl, but quickly looked aside as she reiterated, mumblingly, "I don't know any Ida Holm, I tell you. I never heard of such a person."

"She does," and Ida Campbell nodded her head slowly. "She may not know any such person, for it may be an imaginary one, or a name out of a story book, but that Ida Holmes has a real significance for Lane I am positive. Why did you say 'Ida Holm! If it should be!' the first time you heard me say the name?"

"I didn't."

"Yes, you did. And I shall find out why. There's no use asking Lane further, she will continue to deny it. But I'm going to find out what she knows about it, and I am going to prove my own identity. And, what is more, I'm going to find out who killed Ralph Howland,—my father."

"Then I must ask you, Miss Campbell," Swift's tone was scornful, "to pursue your investigations by yourself. If you are retained here as companion to Mrs. Howland, I want your position in the household strictly defined, and, I may add, that it will not include unbidden access to this room."

"Then," and Ida Campbell rose suddenly and stepped across the room to where Leonard Swift

sat at the great desk that had been Ralph Howland's, "then I will take this opportunity to collect a little bit of evidence."

With quick movements, she picked up something from the desk, something tiny, invisible to the others, and, selecting an envelope from the stationery rack, she carefully inserted her finding in it and by a touch of her rosy tongue-tip, she sealed the envelope and returned to her seat.

"What did you take?" Swift asked, angrily.

"It is not for you, it is for the detective," she replied. "When will he be here again?"

"You shall not take anything from my desk! Give me that envelope!" Swift fairly stormed at her.

"No, I will not give it to you. I will give it to the detective,—or to Doctor Avery."

"Very well, my child," the mystified doctor spoke kindly, "give it to me, then."

Carefully the girl opened the envelope, and disclosed a minute fragment of glass,—two or three of them. Mere specks they were, two slender shards, and a round bit, perhaps one-eighth of an inch across.

The round piece had jagged edges and Doctor Avery said at once. "That's the thing that made the cut on Ralph Howland's cheek! The tiny scar was just the size and shape of that. His face fell on that bit of glass!"

"And the glass stayed here all this time!" exclaimed Swift. "Incredible!"

"No," said Magee, "the detectives left orders not

to dust or disturb the desk. But I think they had given up hope of finding any evidence. How did you happen to see that, Miss Campbell?"

"A ray of light struck it, and I noticed the glitter," she said, simply. "What do you make of it, doctor?"

"I begin to think Ralph Howland was murdered," Avery said, gravely. "And by a diabolically clever method."

"Explain, won't you?" said Esterbrook.

"This piece of glass," Avery began, "is the end of a tiny tube that has contained some volatile compound. You are all familiar with the little tubes of smelling salts, that ladies carry with them, in case of faintness?"

"Yes, I know," said Edith Mills. "Little things wrapped in cotton in a silk case,—and you break one and get a whiff of scented ammonia,—or something like that."

"Yes, that is what I mean. Now Howland wouldn't be apt to have those about, would he?"

"No," Miss Mills declared. "Not he."

"And, too," the doctor continued, "I think I can detect the presence of mercury and a trace of powder that means,—oh, there is no doubt about it. It explains Mason's belief. I am sure now that Howland was killed and this is the instrument,—or a piece of it. This tiny tube contained either cyanogen or hydrocyanic acid, a single breath of which would cause instant death. And, moreover, would leave no trace. And, again, I know that if

this is true, if Ralph *was* killed this way, I know that in the matter of the autopsy, there *would* be a single whiff of the odor of prussic acid, and no more. That is what Doctor Mason noticed, though I happened to miss it."

"All this is most important," said Leonard Swift, regarding the doctor gravely. "It means we must find the murderer and bring him to justice. I feared it was a case of murder, but I could imagine no means that could have been used. Now you've discovered the means, there is immediate work to be done. Whoever killed my cousin must suffer the penalty."

"If we can catch him," said Esterbrook.

"That's work for a detective," Swift said.

"And hard work, too," Magee declared. "It's over two weeks since the crime was committed,—pretty late to look for clews."

Leonard Swift was studying Magee's face.

"I remember you were very anxious to be executor of Ralph's will, Mr. Magee," he said, at last.

Magee flushed.

"You put it queerly," he returned. "Mr. Howland asked me to be his executor, and I consented."

"Oh, come now, didn't you first suggest it to him?"

"I'm not sure. We were discussing the matter and it was arranged that I should be executor."

"Well, it doesn't matter. I thought Ralph told me you insisted upon it,—but it's of no consequence."

"Doctor Avery—" Ida Campbell turned a troubled face to the old man—"is there any reason to believe,—is there the slightest chance that Mrs. Howland,—that my mother, in her dementia, could have done this thing?"

"Bless my soul, no!" cried the startled doctor. "How could she? I don't say but what she was unsettled enough that night not to know what she was about,—but how could she get this sort of thing,—this cyanogen capsule?"

"She has them filled with lavender salts," Edith Mills informed them. The stenographer was sitting, wide-eyed and breathless, listening to the surprising disclosures.

"Of course," said the doctor, impatiently, "I know that. But she couldn't get one with this poison gas in it to save her life."

"That's where our investigation must begin," said Swift, thoughtfully. "Who *could* get such a thing? It is not, I should say, easily procurable. Miss Campbell, how did you recognize that bit of glass so quickly?"

"In the hospital, in France, we were familiar with many such things," the girl replied. "The chemists over there made many little inventions like that."

"And you brought some over here?" asked Swift, looking at her.

"No, I didn't. I brought only the knowledge and memory of them."

The girl seemed about to say more, then stopped herself.

"Well, you are doubtless the only person present who knew of the existence of such a thing. I think you spotted that bit of glass rather quickly."

"Meaning that I had a hand in my father's death?" The words were quietly spoken, but a glint came into the hazel eyes.

CHAPTER XI

"I Can't Prove Anything!"

"TELL me more about my childhood," the girl begged, as she walked with Mary Howland through the rose garden and on toward the orchard.

The rose bushes were gaunt and bare, not yet swathed in their winter straw. But the well-kept paths were attractive, and the view across the autumn landscape was picturesque and pleasing.

"You were the darlingest baby," Mrs. Howland said, ever ready to talk on this subject. "Your curls were golden then,—they're a lovely brown now, dear, but then they were pure gold. And your little round face was rosy and sweet."

"What did I call you?"

"'Mudda.' You couldn't say mother, and the way you said 'mudda' was adorable."

"I was a pretty big girl to talk so crooked at five years old, wasn't I?"

"One reason was, we never corrected you. Your father and I thought it so cunning and attractive we rather encouraged it. And you had a funny little way of using plurals wrong. You always said, 'I want milks,' or 'I want my baths,' or 'I want to go walks.' You would say, 'P'ease put on my

hats and my coats,' as if you wore several of each! Oh, you were an angel baby,—but now I have you back, I find you are an angel daughter still,—my Angela."

"You feel that,—don't you, mother? You feel sure I really belong to you?"

"Bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh. Yes, dear, I am sure. If only your father could have lived to see this day."

"Did he love me as much as you did?"

"Oh, yes. But, of course, men are not quite so foolishly demonstrative. I was always petting you and fondling you. Your father rarely kissed you, but I have seen him look at you with such pride and admiration that I knew he adored you fully as much as I did."

"Do you think if he were here, he would feel as you do? That I am really Angela?"

"I'm sure he would. He couldn't help it. I note new proofs every day. I see little things,—little traits of character, that remind me of him, or of myself. Yes, sweetheart, you *are* Angela."

"But I can't prove it."

"No; but that doesn't matter. Let us go away and live by ourselves, somewhere."

It was thus that Mary Howland's reason, though restored greatly, was still warped in some ways.

Content in her belief in her child's identity, satisfied merely to have her daughter with her, she cared nothing whether they remained at Howlands or moved to some other home.

Doctor Avery favored a change, thinking it would completely restore Mary's mental balance to get away from the home of sad memories.

But Angela wanted to stay at Howlands. She declared it was not only her home, but her heritage. She vowed she would yet make good her claim and establish herself as the head of the house of Howland, and owner of the entire estate.

Leonard Swift scoffed at the idea, but in his heart he felt a bit uneasy, lest this indomitable young spirit should yet keep her word.

"Why is Nurse Lane so down on me, mother?" Angela asked, as, arm in arm, they walked along to the orchard.

"Only jealousy, dear. She is uncertain whether you are really you or not; but, aside from that, she is of a fearfully jealous nature, and she can't bear to see me turn to you for little offices or favors instead of to her. It is silly,—foolish,—but Lane is like that. She is jealous of Etta, of the doctor, of any one who seems to mean anything to me. Don't mind her."

"But I do mind her. I think I might prove my claim if she'd come over to our side. Can't you influence her, mother?"

"I, dear? No. Don't you understand? The more I'd ask her to accept you the more she'd hold out against you."

"Even if she believes in me? Oh, mother, could Lane be so cruel as to deny my identity when she herself believes in it?"

"She could, indeed, my dear. Lane is a stubborn, insistent old thing. And freakish. She adored you as a baby, yet, even then, she was jealous of you. Don't bother about Lane, Angela. Leave her out of it. She can't take you away from me,—and that is all I care about."

"Darling mother"—and Angela stopped in the path to kiss her—"no one shall ever do that. If I can't make good my claim to Howlands,—I'll still stay with you, wherever we may be."

The girl's eyes wandered across the wide acres of the estate on to the village, the valley and the distant hills beyond.

No object that she saw, no house, no tree, no hillside view stirred in her mind the least remembrance. For anything she could recognize this might be her first sight of these things.

Was it?

She wondered.

They came to the orchard. It was her first visit, and Angela expressed surprise and delight at the large number of fruit trees, and their fine condition.

"Yes, the gardeners have always felt a pride in the orchard," Mary Howland said. "See this great ring of trees. Almost a perfect circle."

"A fairy ring!" Angela cried. "This is where the fairies dance on Midsummer Eve."

"Yes. That's what we told you when you were a little girl."

"Oh, did you,—did you, mother? Then that's

a proof!" and the girl's eyes shone. "Why, that shows I remember."

"Yes," Mary Howland's tone was indifferent. She had no interest in proving that the girl beside her was her daughter. She knew. That was enough for her.

But not enough for others. And, especially, not enough for Leonard Swift.

That very evening he called Miss Campbell, as she was known to all but Mary, to the library.

"This matter has got to be settled," he said, sternly, almost roughly. "I think, since Mrs. Howland is so attached to you, it would be best for you two to go somewhere and live together. But I want no further nonsense about your claims to inheritance here, and I want you to sign some sort of a quit-claim paper—"

"Which I refuse to do." Ida Campbell faced him calmly.

"Then, I'm sorry, but you will be forced, by law, to do it."

"Indeed!" The tone was ironical. "Just what law will make me do that?"

As Swift's mention of a law was a mere threat, he said, a little lamely, "I don't know legal lore enough to tell you that, but I do know that your imposture cannot go on." He turned on her, almost fiercely. "You *know* you're a fraud! You know it! You and Magee made up the scheme between you, and you can't deny that! Now, will you go, before I expose you both,—there is a grave penalty

for imposture,—or shall I be obliged to show you up?"

"It isn't so," but Ida Campbell shrank as if from a blow. "I *don't* know that I am a fraud,—I am *not* sure that I am an impostor! You shan't talk to me like that! Oh, have I no friends here?"

"Only Mrs. Howland," Swift said, and went on, cruelly, "and she is insane."

"She isn't insane! She is perfectly rational—"

"On some subjects, yes. But her mind is far from clear on other matters, and her word in your favor would have no weight in a court of law."

"A court of law!" Ida breathed the words, and her face went white.

"Of course. Unless you give up your scheme, I shall take the matter into court, you will be tried as an impostor, and your sentence will be no light one!"

"Oh, stop! Don't!" the poor child put her hands over her ears. "What shall I do? I want a friend!"

"You have no friends, because you are doing wrong,—you are a criminal." Swift's voice was cold, inexorable. "The only friend you have in this house,—outside of a sick, irresponsible woman,—is Magee,—your partner in crime!"

"Hush! I won't hear such talk!" The girl's eyes blazed now. "You have overshot your mark, Mr. Swift! I think from your belligerent manner you are not so sure of yourself as you pretend. I am not going to give up this thing without a fight. Go on,—take the case to law! I am not afraid of you!"

"Not afraid of me"—his look was concentrated hate—"but you may well be afraid of the courts! Your ignorance is the explanation of your bravado. You know nothing of what awaits you. A trial will mean your deepest distress, your defeat and downfall. As a friend, I warn you, not to brave such disaster."

"As a friend!" the scorn in her little face was so great as to make Swift a bit uncomfortable. "Don't you ever dare to claim friendship with me! Angela Howland is insulted at the mere suggestion!"

"But Ida Campbell makes the mistake of her life if she rejects the friendship of Leonard Swift. Not that I feel specially friendly toward you, but I can tell you a mild friendliness would be better for you than my enmity."

"Why are you my enemy?" The girl turned to him suddenly, her eyes filling, her red lip quivering. "Why won't you help me investigate my claim,—you know I have one,—and then, if it *is* proved false,—I will go away."

"You'll go away now,—or you'll find yourself in the deepest trouble you ever imagined. Why am I your enemy? First, because you are a willful impostor,—a criminal,—and second, because you reject my friendship,—leaving me only one attitude to take toward you. And it is the attitude of the entire household. Nurse Lane knows you for an impostor. Edith Mills, clear-sighted girl, declares you are a fraud. The servants have no faith in you—"

"The servants! Angela Howland is not to be judged by servants! Lane, I admit, is to be considered, but no other servants!"

"Lane denounces you. I know"—his voice grew soft for a moment—"Mrs. Howland is so glad at the thought of recovering her child that she *thinks* she recognizes you. But her poor, disordered mind cannot count. Yet it proves that she does not really recognize you,—or, Lane would do so. A nurse knows a little child quite as well as a mother does."

"No"—and Ida's eyes grew solemn—"no, there is an instinct,—an ineradicable memory that—"

"Poppycock! A mother's love is a beautiful thing,—in sentiment,—but as practical proof, it amounts to just nothing at all! So, there now, Miss Ida Campbell, what's your next move?"

"I have none to make," she answered easily, almost pertly. "The moves are yours. Just when are you going to put me out?"

She couldn't have chosen a better way to put Swift's anger to rout. Her piquant, saucy little face looked smiling into his; her eyes were brave, dauntless,—it was clearly to be seen she knew no such thing as fear.

Exasperated beyond limit, he was yet spellbound by the lovely, mobile face, the dancing eyes, the pouting lips.

"You witch!" he cried, involuntarily, and then quickly resuming his stern air, he said, "I think I must ask you to go practically at once. At least, begin at once to make your plans. If you are to

be Mrs. Howland's companion, your salary will probably be ample for your needs. Mrs. Howland has quite enough money to live comfortably, even handsomely,—and I trust,—and I hope you will be happy with her."

"Oh, you do! You *do!*" the slender figure drew itself up to its full height, and as Ida Campbell left the room, she flung over her shoulder,

"You've overreached yourself, Mr. Swift."

"She said that before," mused Swift, "now what the devil does she mean by it?"

"What's the matter?" asked Edith Mills, meeting Ida in the hall. "You look like a young tornado."

"Had a set-to with Mr. Swift," and the brown eyes still gleamed with an expression of injured innocence.

"Come for a walk, and tell me about it."

Attracted by this seeming friendliness, Ida took Edith's arm, and they walked up and down the long verandah.

"Do you believe I am Angela Howland?" Ida asked, earnestly, and then, without waiting for an answer, she exclaimed, "I can't stand that Mr. Swift! He makes me angry, just to talk to him! He's so unjust, so unwilling to talk reason!"

"But you see, my dear, what you think reason and what he thinks reason are two very different things."

"What do *you* think?"

This time Ida looked at her companion and waited for the reply.

"I can't make you out," Edith said. "I'm not so much concerned with the question of whether you're Angela or not, as I am with the question of whether you think you are—"

"Meaning I am a willful impostor!"

"Are you?"

"How can I be, when my own mother knows me?"

"You're begging the question. In her present mental state, Mrs. Howland would recognize any sweet young girl as her daughter, if the sweet young girl said she was."

"I don't think so," Ida began slowly, and then they were interrupted by the sudden appearance of Conrad Stryker.

"Who—who is that?" and Ida clutched Edith's arm.

"Why, don't you know?—that's Conrad,—the idiot boy. Hello, Conrad, what do you want?"

"Nothing,—nothing—" The drawling voice dropped to a mere whisper.

Ida Campbell went closer to him. She looked into the vacant face,—the lack-luster eyes, and taking his hands in hers, said, "Conrad! I know you!"

"Oh, come now," and Edith Mills laughed lightly, "that won't help any, Ida! If you are Angela, you couldn't remember this poor boy whom you probably never saw even when you were a baby,—and if you're not Angela, why, of course, you don't know him."

"But I do know him! He carried me once,—I remember it!"

"Carried you! Where? When?"

"When I was little. I don't know where, but I do remember that he carried me in his arms."

"Did you, Conrad?" and Edith looked at him, doubtfully.

"Did I what? Did I what?" he babbled.

"Did you carry this lady—"

"No, no," interrupted Ida, "did you carry a little girl,—a baby?"

"Carry the baby? Oh, yes,—oh, yes,—Conrad carried the baby, this way,—this way—"

Cradling his arms, the foolish boy pretended to hold a baby in them, and leaned over, crooning, in a perfect imitation of soothing a little child.

"Yes, yes, Conrad carried the baby—it's all right, —it's all right now."

A wide vacuous smile made his speech seem utterly meaningless, and Ida Campbell sighed.

"I don't understand it," she said, "but I do remember that face. He did carry me when I was little."

"If you could prove that," Edith said, with a touch of irony, "it might mean that you were here as a baby,—for I'm sure Conrad never has been away from Normandale in his life."

"I can't prove it," said Ida, sadly; "I can't seem to prove anything."

"Well, things are going to be proved for you. Mr. Swift is going to see the Harrisons again, and

he thinks he will get evidence enough to prove that you and Mr. Magee made up this racket."

"No!" Ida turned white. "It isn't fair to drag the Harrisons into this! They don't know anything about me!"

"Oh, don't they! Well, Leonard thinks they do, —and he's going to see them. O'Brien advises it."

"O'Brien?"

"The detective. I tell you, Ida Campbell, you're pretty smart, but you can't put anything over on Len Swift! You'd have to get up early in the morning to fool him!"

"Oh, should I?" and Ida Campbell smiled suddenly and nodded her pert little head. "Oh, should I, Miss Edith Mills?"

This sudden change of demeanor made Edith stare, and she was still staring as Ida left her and ran into the house.

Straight to the library she went and entered without knocking.

Swift, at the desk, looked up in annoyance.

"I don't remember sending for you, Miss Campbell."

"No, you didn't. I just came." And she smiled at him.

His scornful gaze irritated her, and she dropped her white eyelids for an instant, and then her eyes quickly reappeared, still sparkling.

She laughed with her eyes, talked with them,—sometimes explained with them her otherwise incomprehensible speech.

Also she had a little rippling laugh, which she would suddenly check, to the deep regret of her hearers, and then as unexpectedly it would break forth again.

She was not unaware of the charm of these tricks of hers, but she had never before encountered a man who was so utterly indifferent to them as Leonard Swift.

The variations of her expression left him unaffected, the matter of what she had to say interested him not a whit.

She told him that Miss Mills had informed her that he proposed to visit the Harrisons, and she asked that she might go with him.

"But why?" he asked, coldly. "If they tell me anything in your favor—"

"You'll never repeat it!" she cried, smiling wickedly. "I know you, Mr. Leonard Swift! You'll learn anything you can, and what suits your purpose you'll reveal; and what you don't like, you'll suppress! Now, I won't stand that sort of performance,—not for one minute!"

She smiled and waited for him to speak. As he kept silent, she began again.

"And so, sir, you'll let me go with you or—"

"Or?" he watched her steadily.

"Or—or—oh, I don't know!" Her bravado gave way at last, and she broke down and cried.

Not noisy weeping, but with great silent stifled sobs that shook her slender shoulders as she bowed her head on her arms.

Swift looked at her coldly.

"You needn't think to move me that way, Miss Campbell. Don't you know, you silly girl, that everything you say, everything you do, only makes me more convinced of your untruthfulness,—of your fraud! Even if I wanted to believe in you, I could not do so! You are simply impossible! You don't want me to go to the Harrisons' because you fear what they will tell me about you."

"I don't!" She rose and faced him stormily. The tears wet on her cheeks, her angry eyes and flushed little face made a striking picture, and Swift was forced into a grudging admiration of her beauty. This, however, he did not show, and only said:

"If you are quite through with your histrionics, you may be excused; but I will talk to you again when you are more calm."

"You won't! I'll never speak to you again! But I shall win the day! You'll find it's a game two can play at,—and I believe I have the trump cards!"

CHAPTER XII

The Harrison Story

"I THINK, Mrs. Harrison," Leonard Swift said, "that you must tell me all you know of the matter. Indeed, unless you do, you will find yourself in serious trouble."

"But I liked Miss Campbell,—we all liked her. She's a dear girl and I can't bear to think she is a wrongdoer of any sort."

"She may not be. But it is not for you to judge. So, you'd better confide in me, now, and save yourself the trouble and annoyance of having the detectives come here on this same errand."

"But I know very little."

"Tell that." Swift was laconic.

The lady still demurred. "I overheard it," she said, "and it seems so mean to repeat—"

"It is necessary," said Swift, sternly. "No more hesitation, now, tell it out."

"Mr. Magee was calling—"

"He came often?"

"Not often, but he came two or three times, quite close together."

"And saw Miss Campbell alone?"

"Yes; though I sat in the adjoining room."

"And could hear their conversation?"

"Yes, I could. I didn't listen, especially, but neither did I suppose it was of a private nature."

"Go on."

"What I remember most distinctly is the last time he was here; he was evidently trying to persuade her to do something that she was disinclined to do."

"Ah," and Swift leaned forward in breathless interest.

"And he said,—I don't remember the exact words, of course,—but he said, in effect, 'Keep up a brave front, and you can carry it off,' and 'Insist that you are Angela, and they will believe it.' Then she would say, 'Oh, I can't—I'm afraid,' and Mr. Magee would insist again."

"You're sure of all this, Mrs. Harrison?" Swift looked very grave. "You're sure Angela was the name they used?"

"Oh, yes; and she said, 'How can I act a lie? It isn't right!' and he said, 'Yes, it *is* right! You *are* Angela.' And at last she agreed to his wishes and promised to do exactly as he told her."

"This is so very important, Mrs. Harrison, that I must ask you to make an affidavit. Do not refuse, for it is demanded in the name of the law."

Impressed by this statement, Mrs. Harrison made no objection to signing a paper on which Swift had written, almost *verbatim,* the information she had just given him. A parlor maid was called in to witness the lady's signature, and with this document safely in his pocket, Swift went away.

As soon as he could reach the office of Detective

O'Brien, the two put their heads together over this new and incriminating evidence.

"You see, the girl is not so much to blame as Magee," Swift observed. "I've suspected he was at the bottom of it all. And,—may it not be that—I'd rather not say it."

"I know," and O'Brien nodded his head. "Mightn't it be that Magee did for Mr. Howland. I've never been able to dope it out before,—but if Magee and this girl are in cahoots, maybe Magee *is* the criminal, aided and abetted—"

"Oh, don't drag the girl into that part of it!"

"But, she's the only human being that I know of who knew about those poison bulbs,—or tubes, or whatever you call 'em. Says she saw 'em in France—"

"But it was she who picked up the bits of glass as evidence."

"Bluff—or maybe she didn't know Magee was—no, that won't do. Well, we're on the trail. If that girl, sprung from nowhere, is picked out by Magee to impersonate the Howland baby, you must see the whole thing is a deep-laid and clever plot. Say Howland did put Magee on the track of the dentists and all that to find his daughter. Say Magee, unable to do any better, finds this particular girl, with the spread apart teeth, and all that. Now, he knows she isn't the daughter, but he thinks if she will pretend she is, they can put it over. Then,—say his plan fails because Howland won't fall for it.

So,—he puts Howland out of the way and goes ahead with the plot."

"What does he get out of it?"

"Can't you see through a millstone with a hole in it! He'll marry the girl, of course."

"Good Lord! Do you think all that's true—".

"I dunno. I've only begun to look into it. I don't say I've got it exactly to rights yet, but I do think we're on the trail. Don't you?"

"I—I don't know what to think. I know Magee and Mr. Howland were discussing this thing when I went in the library, that night he died."

"Were they quarreling?"

"Not about this. They were a little at odds, because Magee was trying to advise Mr. Howland not to listen to a mine project that was being offered him. But they were talking about this lost daughter business, and when I came in they shut right up about it."

"That the last talk they had about it?"

"I suppose so,—a few hours after that Mr. Howland died."

"Well, if Magee, say, went down to see him later that night,—and if they couldn't agree, and if Magee *was* the villain,—mind you, I don't yet say he was,—but *if* he was,—he had time and opportunity,—now, didn't he?"

"Certainly he did,—but there's no real proof."

"That's got to be dug up. If Austin Magee is the man we're after, we'll find some proof."

"You won't have to drag the girl into this graver charge, will you?"

"Not unless we can learn that she gave him the poison thing—from France."

"Oh, she never did that! To poison her father!"

"Her father! She isn't really the Howland baby!"

"No,—of course not. But I meant to poison the man she claims for her father."

"If that girl is enough of a wrong un to pretend to be the Howland child when she isn't, she's wrong un enough for anything!"

"No; there's a wide difference between an impostor and a murderer."

"I know; of course there is. But, all that will come out,—if there's anything back of it."

The daily life at Howlands had taken on a strange, unsettled air.

As always, the ordering was done by the butler, and the routine work was in charge of a housekeeper. Old servants these, and willing to go on with their duties, even though Ralph Howland's death had left the place without a master.

Mary Howland preserved a semblance of authority, which, however, was assuming day by day more of the real thing. She presided at the table, while Leonard Swift, assuming it his right, sat opposite her.

The secretary, the stenographer and Ida Campbell were usually present, and the conversation at

meals was, more often than not, light, even sparkling.

Whatever might be the undercurrent of feeling, it seemed to be an unwritten law that table talk must be courteous and impersonal.

The appointments of dinner were rather formal, as had always been the Howlands' custom, and coffee was served in the living-room.

Austin Magee and Ida Campbell were taking theirs together, as they sat in a deep window-seat.

They were not hidden from view, but the room was so large, their murmured conversation was in small danger of being overheard.

"I'm not quite sure," the girl was saying, "but I think Mr. Swift has interviewed Mrs. Harrison."

"I know he has. Also, he has since seen O'Brien."

Magee looked gloomy of face as he stirred his coffee unheedingly.

Then Ida said: "What shall we do? Would it not be best to tell the whole truth?"

"We can't talk here. Will you go out on the terrace with me?"

"I daren't. They're all watching us."

"Will you join me there, later, then?"

"Yes; after I've spent a time with mother in her room."

"Very well. Be out there by ten. I'll wait for you on the south side."

The two rose and sauntered toward the table, where Ida put down her empty cup and then took a chair by Mary Howland's side.

"Pretty one," and a motherly hand patted the soft bare shoulder of the girl, "you must sing for me to-night."

"Yes, mother; up in your room,—not here."

"Why not here?" said Swift, pleasantly; "let us all enjoy it."

It was his plan to treat Ida, in the company of others, quite as an honored guest. What he had to say to her seriously he said to her alone.

"Thank you, Mr. Swift"—she flashed a smile at him—"but I sing awfully well, and I hate to waste it on those who only ask it out of politeness."

"I don't do that," declared Magee. "Do sing downstairs, Miss Campbell."

"Yes, do," and Edith Mills added her plea. "I've never heard you sing—"

"Oh, Edith! with your acute hearing, you must have heard me—"

"Oh, of course, from another room—"

"Never mind," and Ida smiled impartially on them all. "I'm not going to sing to-night, except for my mother alone."

"Selfish little piece!" and Leonard Swift gave the girl a glance that was more flattering than she had looked for from him.

"Is he thawing?" she asked herself, in wonder. "Can I get him around yet?"

Then to Swift, "Oh, I don't want you to think me selfish." There was the slightest emphasis on the "you" and the brown eyes were wistful as she gave him a quick glance.

Both the tone and the look were more friendly than she had ever before given Swift, and there was something in them that went to his head.

In spite of himself, in spite of his hate of this girl, he found himself saying:

"Then change your mind—and sing—for me."

"For you,—alone, some time—perhaps—" Ida's voice fell to an almost inaudible whisper, meant only for Swift, who was near her.

But it didn't escape Edith Mills' sharp ear, and her heart gave a sudden throb of fear.

Leonard Swift was her own quarry,—though she had not yet caught him,—or, at least, he did not know that she had. Nor did she believe that Ida Campbell had the slightest interest for him or in him.

But the whispered sentence, the answering look that Swift gave toward the alluring little face, convinced Miss Mills of a possible danger which must be averted at any cost.

Whereupon Edith Mills became at once the foe of Ida Campbell, and hereafter it was to be war to the knife, on Edith's side, at any rate.

Apparently quite unaware of this, Ida rose, saying, "Come along, Edith, let's go up to mother's room and we'll both sing to her."

The trio went away, and a constrained silence fell on the two men who stayed behind.

"Well, Magee," said Swift, at last, "I think I must ask you to get along a little faster with your

duties as executor. I'd like to get my affairs into some sort of shape."

"Can't do it, I'm afraid. There's a lot to be cleared up before the provisions of that will can be carried out."

"Meaning just what?"

"First, the death of Ralph Howland must be accounted for. If that man was killed, you know, I suppose, that it may make a difference in his bequests."

"No, I don't know that."

"I only say it may. Then again, if Miss Campbell is Angela Howland,—it will make a very decided difference."

"Doubtless. And there's no one more fitted to tell whether Miss Campbell is Angela or not, than—yourself."

"Ah, you've seen Mrs. Harrison."

"I have."

"And she has given you to understand that the appearance of Ida—of Angela—is a—"

"A wicked, scheming plot,—devised by you, and carried out, against her will, by Miss Campbell!"

"Be careful, Swift, don't accuse blindly—"

"Blindly nothing! I know all about it. Mrs. Harrison heard you two precious scamps talking,—no, she didn't eavesdrop, she sat in the next room—"

"Of course she did—we knew she was there—"

"But you didn't know she heard your plans! You didn't know she heard enough to prove your im-

posture! But you can't put it over! You may as well give up the game!"

"And then?"

"And then I will come into my own. Affairs will be duly settled up,—and, Magee, if you care to stay on as my secretary, you may."

"Thank you,—I feel sure I have other plans."

"Care to tell them?"

"Not at present."

The two men looked at each other. When their eyes met, both glanced away, only to resume scrutiny at the first opportunity.

At last Swift spoke, with something of an effort.

"I want you to understand me clearly, Magee. If you are ready to drop your part of this farce,—this imposture,—I will see to it that Miss Campbell drops her claim. That all out of the way, I will use my utmost endeavors to learn the truth about Ralph's death. I will engage a detective from New York,—I know of a good one,—"

"So do I."

"But I won't attend to that until this fool Angela business is settled. Understand me,—if I thought for a minute that the girl had the ghost of a claim, I'd willingly hand everything over to her—"

"Why tell that very superfluous falsehood?"

Magee's tone was insolent, yet Swift didn't seem to mind that so much as he did the implication of the words.

"It isn't a falsehood," he asseverated, apparently without rancor. "I truly would give up in a minute

to the real Angela. But this impostor,—this wilful usurper,—oh, pshaw, you know how ridiculous her claim is!"

"She has teeth just like her mother's," said Magee, slowly, "and—"

"Rubbish! That's nothing. Nor is it anything that Mary Howland cottons to her. What sad bereft woman wouldn't love a girl who pretended to be her lost daughter!"

"Excuse me, Swift, I have some matters to look after," and without further good night, Magee strode from the room.

For it was on the stroke of ten, and he wanted to see Ida Campbell.

He found her already at the appointed meeting place.

"Forgive my tardiness," he said; "Swift was talking to me."

"He has seen Mrs. Harrison?"

"Yes; and she overheard all we said,—and put the worst possible construction on it."

"There were not many constructions to choose from," the girl said, with a bitter little laugh.

"Ida,—tell me, can't you get proofs,—some kind, —any kind?"

"All I can think of is that Miss Jane said she left a record of the whole episode of finding the baby among her things in France. The clothes, you know, are in Australia, but these records in France—"

"Where in France?"

"Saint Germain. In a house called Villa du Bois. I'm sure they must be there still for the people who live there are old and staid. I wish I could go back there and get them."

"Are all Miss Campbell's papers there?"

"Yes; except what are in Australia. How would it be for mother and me to make a trip over there—"

"Swift wouldn't let you go."

"On the contrary, I think he'd be glad to have me go."

"Not he! Ida,—are you blind? Can't you see the man's in love with you?"

"With me! Nonsense!" Her dainty little laugh rang out. "You fool yourself—"

"Not I. But I don't care a whoop if he is,—if you're not in love with him! Are you?"

"I! Leonard Swift! I care for him less than for any man in the whole universe!"

"And don't you care that he loves you?"

"Not the tiniest mite—"

"Well, then,—do you care that *I* love you?"

"Ah," she gave a little gasping sigh. "Ah,—that's different—"

And Austin Magee knew at once that it *was* different.

In the shadow of the great pillars of the verandah, he took her gently in his arms and whispered, "And are you mine? May I fight for your rights, your birthright, your heritage?"

"I shall be glad to have some one to fight for me," she said, simply, and then, yielding to his caress, she

added, "and I am yours. But only if I am proved to be Angela,—not if I'm a—a wicked impostor,—and"—a little sob came into her voice—"and—I am,—I am an impostor!"

"Yes"—and Swift's cold voice cut in on theirs—"you are an impostor, Miss Campbell, and I'm glad to hear you admit your perjury. Will you come with me? I want a little talk with you?"

"Yes, I will," and a sudden determination in her voice caused Swift to look at her sharply.

"You come, too, Magee," he said, over his shoulder, and they all went to the library.

"I wasn't eavesdropping," Swift said, a bit curtly, "but I was out there in search of you two. And I distinctly heard Miss Campbell say she was an impostor. This I consider a confession, and I want it in writing, with you, Magee, as a witness."

"Can't you use it without a witness?" asked Magee, a little curiously.

"No; I doubt if it would be any good in law unless witnessed. But you can't well refuse. Now, Miss Campbell, I will write down just what you said, and if, on reading it, you agree that it *is* what you said, I'll trouble you to sign it, and Magee to witness it,—and that will clear up all this matter."

Swift was almost jubilant as he prepared to write his screed.

"Excuse me a minute," Magee said, "I left my cigarette case on the porch table."

He left the room, and in a few moments Swift

had his document prepared and gave it to Ida to read.

"Where's Magee?" he asked, not having noticed his departure.

"He went for his cigarette case. He hasn't come back yet."

They waited. Ida Campbell read the paper over twice. It contained only the exact words she had used, and an affidavit that she had said them, and that they were true. But Magee did not come back.

Impatiently Swift went in search of him.

But he didn't find him that night,—nor the next day, nor the next;—nor at all.

Austin Magee had vanished,—absolutely and mysteriously vanished.

CHAPTER XIII

Not Sure!

THE disappearance of Austin Magee was inexplicable, except on the assumption of his guilty connection with the mysteries of Howlands.

"It's tantamount to a confession," Leonard Swift said; "and not only a confession of collusion with Miss Campbell in her imposture, but it seems to me to indicate his connection with the graver crime of Ralph Howland's—"

"Don't say murder," broke in Esterbrook, who, in the library, was discussing these things. "Even if the poison bulb idea is the correct one, we can't say it was not suicide."

"Nothing of that sort!" Edith Mills declared positively. "I knew Mr. Howland too well to believe him capable of suicide. And why would he? He had everything to live for—"

"You don't know all his affairs," and Swift shook his head. "It may be he had some secret troubles, —many men have—"

"Well, it was nothing financial," Esterbrook asserted. "He had money enough to sink a ship, and his accounts are in perfect order."

"I know it," Swift sighed moodily. "And I want to get my inheritance fixed up, and now here's

Magee absconded, and there'll be the devil to pay, getting my title to the estate."

"Ought not to be," Esterbrook reassured him; "that is, so far as Magee's absence is concerned. But what about the Campbell claim?"

"Magee's flight puts the kibosh on that!" Swift pronounced. "Here that man's been gone three days now, and no trace can be found of him. He'll never turn up again."

"Oh, ridiculous! Of course he will. Why, he'll want his own share of the estate, and as executor that'll amount to quite a pile."

"Even so," Swift disagreed, "I don't think he'll return. I know Magee,—he's a queer duck. He hung on to that fable of the returned Angela as long as he could, and then when he saw the jig was up, —when I asked him to sign that paper, he just lit out,—for good and all."

"Of course he did that to save Ida Campbell," said Edith, meditatively; "your statement, Leonard, that she admitted she was an impostor won't carry any weight if she denies it, which, of course, she will."

"She has," said Esterbrook. "She told me that she wasn't *sure* she was an impostor—"

"Wasn't sure!" exclaimed Swift. "What sort of talk is that? Of course she's sure that she is an impostor, or that she isn't! Is she crazy, too? I've always said the best thing would be for Mrs. Howland and Miss Campbell to go away and live by themselves—"

"But we're not going to do that—" and a determined voice sounded as the door opened, and a determined little figure followed it. "I've come because I've a right here. I've a right as daughter of the house, and I'm going to exercise it."

Miss Campbell seated herself in one of the big leather chairs and crossed her slim black silk legs with deliberation.

She seemed to have a new air of authority, of dignity, and she looked from one to another with a face full of self-confidence.

"You have broken open Mr. Magee's desk?" she said, glancing at it, astonished.

"Yes," the lawyer said, "it was necessary, as there seems to be no sign of Mr. Magee's return."

"I've a perfect right to break it open," Swift said, coldly. "There's no occasion for an explanation, Esterbrook. Austin Magee was Ralph Howland's secretary. For the present he is mine. In his absence, I must have access to his papers."

"Have you learned anything from them?"

Ida's little face was eager, and she sat forward in the big chair.

"Well," said the lawyer, "we found a bundle of papers that it seems the secretary put away there the night of Mr. Howland's death. They are mostly the correspondence about the search for his missing daughter—"

"Me!" and Ida Campbell nodded her head triumphantly.

"You!" and the contempt in Swift's tone was boundless.

Yet the saucy smile that Ida gave him made his glance soften and he could not quite keep the admiration out of his eyes.

The girl radiated hope and courage and showed, moreover, a sort of roguish superiority to circumstances that caught the attention of the lawyer. If she were an impostor, she was surely going to try hard to put it over!

And she must be an impostor. Swift had heard her say so, heard it so positively that he immediately wanted to get it on paper and signed.

Now, to be sure, she was denying that admission, but, of course, she would. And her partner in deception had run away, rather than sign the incriminating paper.

A new thought struck Esterbrook.

Miss Campbell must be in communication with Magee. That would explain her carefree attitude and her self-assurance.

"You know where Mr. Magee is?" he said, half inquiringly, and half accusingly.

"No, I haven't the slightest idea," she returned, and faced the lawyer with such an ingenious expression of sincerity that he instinctively believed her.

Edith Mills, however, more wise to feminine powers of dissembling, did not believe her.

"Miss Campbell would scarcely admit it if she did," the stenographer remarked, pointedly.

"That's so, too," and Ida gave Edith a whimsical smile. "You see, gentlemen"—she included the two nonplused men in her assertive nod—"I have the whip hand. I claim I'm Angela Howland, and, while my proofs are not exactly tangible, yet you have no real disproof. In fact, if I am not Angela, you ought to be able to produce the body of Angela, or some trace of it."

"Not after all these years—" began Esterbrook.

"Yes, some trace or at least some theory that would account for its disappearance from its casket."

"Plenty of theories about that," Swift stated. "Wrong name-plate,—wrong casket—"

"All mere conjecture. Now, I hold that I as that infant was found to be alive and was taken from that casket and given to Miss Campbell. The details of this I do not know exactly, but I hold it to be the truth,—and unless you can offer a true counter proposition, I propose to—fight it out."

She looked from one to another, frowning at Swift, smiling at the lawyer, and—yes, positively giving a tiny, fleeting wink to Edith Mills.

Edith gasped. She didn't exactly hate herself, and she had rather dominated the office affairs of her late lenient employer. And now, retained as stenographer by Leonard Swift, at least for the time being, she expected to wield the same general scepter of dictatorial femininity.

Very pretty Edith was, in her somewhat commonplace way, but beside this new, mercurial little personality, she seemed colorless and inept.

Yet she was very perspicacious. And there was one thing Ida Campbell could do that would make Miss Mills her enemy. That was to ensnare Leonard Swift. This tragedy had not yet been effected, but to Miss Mills the outlook seemed portentous and she had her ear to the ground.

"Fight is a strong word, Miss Campbell," and Swift looked at her curiously.

"And I shall put up a strong fight," was the instant and imperturbable response.

Then, while maintaining her cool, level glance at Swift, Ida Campbell took out her little case of cigarettes and proceeded to light one.

This always incensed Swift. Not her smoking, lots of girls did that,—but the air with which she tapped her cigarette on the back of her little white hand and proceeded to light it, all the while gazing straight at him with a slight, amused smile.

Swift was brave and bold by nature, but when it came to aplomb this girl had him beaten a mile.

He began to bluster.

"If you think, Miss Campbell, that you can put this over, you're making the mistake of your life!"

"And if you think that I can't, you're making the mistake of your life," and she let a thin spiral of smoke escape her red lips.

"This war of words won't get either of you anywhere," said Esterbrook, slowly. "Miss Campbell, the burden of proof rests on you. You can't, as Mr. Swift says, walk in here, stake out a claim, so to speak, and settle down on it."

"Squat on it is the technical term, Mr. Esterbrook," and the ridiculous girl looked at him gravely. "But that's just what I propose to do,—am doing, in fact. Now what's your plan to evict me?"

"Don't talk rubbish!" The lawyer was beginning to lose his temper, yet the silly thing was so absurd,—and so captivating,—it was difficult to be harsh with her. And so he ended up, a little lamely, "Do you plan to retain a lawyer?"

"I hadn't thought of that," she smiled; "will you take my case?"

"He will not!" Swift stormed at her. "Nor will any decent lawyer. Who would lend himself to the furtherance of a crime—perhaps you do not know imposture is a crime?"

"If I don't, it's not because you haven't told me,—several times," and still she showed that faintly amused little grin. "Now, see here, Mr. Esterbrook, I've another bit of proof. I remember Conrad."

She said this with an air of voicing a final and decisive argument.

"You say you do!" Swift cried. "That's nothing. You may say you remember everybody in the village, but it won't amount to *that!*" and he snapped his fingers straight at her.

"Oh, my goodness! don't scare me to death," she cried, in a pretty affectation of fear. "Well, it's time for my walk with mother. I must run. I suppose we may say this will be continued in our

next," and with her inimitable grace and gentle dignity, she rose and left the room.

"An impossible chit!" Swift declared, and from his honest indignation, the sharp-eyed Edith contentedly deduced that he was not going to fall for the impostor's charm.

"An impossible situation," said Esterbrook, musingly. "Here it's three days since Magee disappeared, nearly three weeks since Ralph Howland died, and no ray of light on either mystery. And this girl has to be reckoned with. We can't ignore her claim. What does she mean by saying she remembers Conrad?"

"She does," Edith volunteered. "We met him one day, and she knew him at once,—or said she did."

"Nothing to it," Swift declared. "Mary Howland has told Ida of the half-witted boy, and she pretended she knew him,—though why she thinks that a point in her favor, I can't see."

"Only as it proves an infant memory," Esterbrook offered. "Yet nothing of that sort is real proof. She can fake memories as fast as she can talk. Now, real proof would be—"

"There's no such thing," Swift broke in impatiently. "You know yourself, Esterbrook, the only thing to do with her foolish claim is to quash it,—and at once. I'm thinking of offering her a sum of money—"

Miss Mills laughed outright. "You don't know

friend Ida a little bit!" she scoffed. "I can't see her shutting up for 'a sum of money.'"

"Then she can shut up without it! She's—" But further speech on Swift's part was interrupted by the entrance of Martin with a card.

Following on the butler's heels, yet with no effect of haste, came a good-looking, well set-up man, with eyes of a clear blue and upstanding chestnut hair.

"Yes," he said, "I am Wise," and he looked at Leonard Swift while Swift scanned the card, which read only:

Pennington Wise

"I don't seem to remember sending for you, Mr. Wise," Swift said, his noncommittal expression seeming to reserve judgment for a moment.

"No," said the visitor, easily. "I came of my own accord. May I speak with you a moment?"

Partly of his own accord, and partly in acceptance of Swift's slight nod of invitation, Wise took a chair near the desk.

"I am a detective," he said, "not of the police. I work on my own lines. But I take only cases that are strikingly unusual and of decided mystery interest. It's an avocation with me, not a calling."

"You take a case whether you are asked to do so or not?" Swift inquired, a little unpleasantly.

"Oh, yes, if I can get the consent of the principals." Quite evidently it was difficult to offend this man. "Now, I'm exceedingly interested in the How-

land affair. Especially in the young woman who claims to be the daughter of the house, and also, in the recent disappearance of the private secretary."

"You seem to know all the details," and Swift regarded the man more closely.

"It's all in the papers. On the face of it, it reads like the conventional murder yarn. Rich man, found dead in his library in the early morning by his butler. What could be more hackneyed as an opening proposition? Then to suspect the private secretary,—that, of course, is always done."

"Who suspects Magee?" Swift growled this out.

"I thought you did," and this remarkable detective turned a mild glance at the occupant of Ralph Howland's desk chair.

"I haven't said so," Swift returned, shortly. "I don't expect to say so, and I take exception to your saying so. Moreover, Mr. Wise, I am not in need of a private detective, and if I were, I should prefer to select my own. May we consider this incident closed?"

"Not quite. You see, there are the heirs. Rather a question of the heirs. What about the newly returned daughter of the house?"

"The whole matter, so far as I am concerned," Swift curtly informed him, "is in the hands of my able lawyer, and the police."

"But will the police get anywhere? Will they not, —have they not tried all the ways they know of to learn the truth, and then, failing, let the whole matter slip from their attention and memory?"

"Exactly what they have done, I believe," Esterbrook exclaimed. "I say, Swift, I wish you'd let Mr. Wise look into this thing. I know you well, sir, by reputation, and I, for one, would be mighty glad to have your services."

"And I would not!" Swift was angry now. "And I consider it an impertinence for you to come in here like this, unasked, and positively impudent to remain after I have told you I had no further business with you."

"But if I take it up entirely on my own account,—there would be, I suppose, no objection to that?"

"There would be great and insurmountable objection," Swift said.

"From you, perhaps, Mr. Swift." Esterbrook looked at him gravely. "But as Mr. Howland's lawyer, and in the absence,—the inexplicable absence of his secretary, I should be very glad to engage you, Mr. Wise, on my own initiative.

"You can't do that," and Swift gave him an angry look. "As my lawyer you are at my orders—Advices," he amended, as Esterbrook looked up quickly.

"I don't especially care to be engaged by any one," Wise went on, evenly, "I merely want to look into the case for my own satisfaction. It interests me because of its unusual features. I suppose, Mr. Swift, you would be willing to answer me a few questions,—to let me make some inquiries in the household, to look round a bit,—in the furtherance of law and justice?"

Something in the fine-featured face, something in the clear-cut manner checked Leonard Swift's intended refusal, and he said, grudgingly:

"I suppose you may do that if you wish, but I can't see the use of your drumming up a lot of so-called clews and evidences that lead nowhere—or, in a wrong direction."

"I may get nowhere," and Wise's face was serious, "but I promise you, Mr. Swift, I shan't go in a wrong direction."

It was after a rather prolonged period of silence that Swift finally said, "Do what you like then,—but make your reports to me. I am master here. Mr. Esterbrook has no interests here but mine. There is no one else to consider."

"Mrs. Howland?" suggested Wise, gently.

"No. She is an invalid,—mentally as well as physically. She is subject to hallucinations,—one being that the young lady staying with her is her daughter. So, as you can readily see, her opinion on any matter of importance cannot be asked or considered."

"I see," and Wise nodded his head. "And the young lady you mentioned?"

"Is an impostor,—a girl who found a chance of impersonating the lost child of the Howlands. A daughter, who died in infancy—"

"Yes, yes; I know the details. If the girl is an impostor she ought to be shown up."

"That she ought," agreed Swift, and then added, "but it is not necessary to deal too harshly with her.

She was aided and abetted,—indeed, I may say the plot was invented by an older and wiser head than hers."

"Meaning the missing private secretary?"

"Yes." Swift warmed to his subject. "I have proved that Mr. Magee made up the scheme and coaxed,—almost forced Miss Campbell to play the part he planned for her."

Edith Mills pricked up her ears. If Swift was siding with Ida Campbell, well, she, Edith, had her work cut out!

And then Ida Campbell appeared.

Back from her walk, her bright, tantalizing little face aglow with the results of winter air and sunshine, her pretty hair nestled into a white tam-o'shanter with an astounding tassel, and the rest of her slender person mostly encased in a knitted costume of white wool, she looked the incarnation of joyous expectancy.

"Mr. Wise?" she cried. "Oh, is it? *Are* you Mr. Wise?"

She confronted him, and as his answering smile gave assent, she took him by both hands, crying, "Oh, have you come to get me my rights,—my recognition?"

"If recognition is your right,—I hope—I trust I can get it for you."

The detective looked at her curiously. He seemed attracted by her charm, and even smiled at her eagerness, yet he in no way definitely espoused her cause.

The girl sensed the aloofness in his manner, and her face fell a little. But she said, with no perceptible diminution of enthusiasm:

"Of course it is right that I should be recognized, —that my claim should be admitted. I am Angela Howland. I've just come from a walk with my mother, and we found many things that we both remembered about my babyhood."

Swift's raised eyebrows at this made Wise say:

"Such things form no convincing proof, Miss—Campbell. Is there nothing more material, more practical—"

"My teeth!" she said, making them prettily evident by means of a wide smile.

Wise looked at the little white even teeth, and noted the separation between the two front ones. It was unusual, it was not especially desirable, yet it seemed no detriment to the girl's delicate beauty.

"Just like mother's, you know," she went on, with a confidential little nod at the detective. "And, she says, just like *her* mother's!"

"Indicative but not positive proof," said Wise, "is it the best you have?"

"Oh, I have my love for my mother—her love for me—"

"Of less importance even than the teeth," Swift said, but his glance was not quite as cold as his words,—so Edith Mills noticed.

"And a conviction in your heart?" asked Wise, "are you *sure* you are Angela?"

"No—" she said, turning white, "no—not *sure*."

CHAPTER XIV

Conrad Remembers

THE sun parlor at Howlands was a most comfortable and attractive place. Attached to the house on one side, the other three sides were of glass, and the furnishings were the painted wicker and chintzes that so well suit a sunny lounge. The stone floor met levelly the bricked terraces outside, from which could be seen the distant hills as well as the village nestling in the valley. Swings and settees, rugs and book tables, ingle nooks and a fine big fireplace provided every sort of pleasure and comfort, and here Mary Howland spent much of her time.

"Angela," she said, "why do you smoke cigarettes? I never did."

"Why, I won't, mother, if you'd rather I didn't. It's only habit, everybody did in France, and most people do over here. But I'm not crazy about it,—just as lief give it up as not."

"Oh, no; do as you like,—I don't really care."

And so the girl went on lighting her cigarette, and the flame of the match illuminated her thoughtful little face.

"Mother," she said, "I want you to try to think up all you can about my babyhood. Tell me every

little incident you can remember, no matter how trivial. For a great and clever detective is going to look into things,—and if you and I play our cards right, maybe we can make him decide that I *am* your Angela child,—and maybe he'll let me take my own name and use it. I'm tired of being called Miss Campbell,—when I'm really Angela Howland."

"How do you do, Angela Howland," said a new voice, and from the terrace a girl slid into the room and toward them.

Slid seemed the only word to express her swift, noiseless glide, and as she dropped among the cushions of a chaise longue, she seemed like a wraith or pixie, so slight of figure was she, and so eerie of face.

Her skin was very dark, even sallow, and her black hair was parted and drawn down at the sides in Italian fashion. Yet she was not Italian, her speech was decidedly American, both in voice and accent.

"I'm Zizi," she said, and smoothed down her little black frock, which, though short and scant, yet seemed ample for her tiny slenderness.

"How do you do, Zizi?" and the girl she called Angela Howland flashed a smile at her. "Did you drop from an airship?"

"Oh, no, I walked up from the village. I wanted to see you and Mrs. Howland this morning."

She looked gravely yet courteously toward Mary Howland, who smiled back at her, and said:

"You have some errand?"

"Yes;" again the girl's bird claw of a hand fingered her frock, not nervously, but as if the smoothing of the fabric pleased her.

"Yes," she repeated, "I have an errand. It is to put Angela Howland on the map."

Ida Campbell laughed outright at the slang phrase, which sounded incongruous on the lips of this queer little scrap of humanity.

"I like your errand," she said, nodding her head in approval, "I surely hope you accomplish it. I know who you are now. You're Mr. Wise's assistant."

"Yes," and the sharp black eyes snapped, "and I'm an assistant that assists! Now, first of all, I want you to like me."

"I do that already," Ida smiled; "doesn't everybody?"

"Oh, Lordy, no! Fur frummit! But the people I like usually like me."

"I like you," said Mary Howland, in her soft voice, that always seemed to have a far-away sound, as if the brain that prompted the words was still at a distance. "I like you because you're going to help us. I think, with you to help, we can succeed."

"Of course we can!" and the sharp little brown face fairly twitched in determination.

It was easily seen that this queer person was a bundle of nerves. All her motions were quick and sudden, yet not jerky. She was a live wire, and her

snapping black eyes flew from one face to the other of her auditors as she began to detail her plans.

"First of all, Mrs. Howland"—her crisp little voice grew gentler as she addressed the older woman —"I want you to recall everything you can about your baby, Angela. Tell me stories of her—"

"Just what I was asking as you came in!" exclaimed Ida Campbell. "Let me help, too."

"Of course you'll help," said Zizi, "you're to do most of it."

"But I can't remember anything very special," Mrs. Howland said, wrinkling her brows in a pathetic effort to do what was asked of her. "You see, Angela was just a normal baby,—she played with her dolls and ate her bread and milk like any child would."

"Yes,—and then she grew ill—" Zizi spoke carefully, yet determinedly leading the thought of the mother.

"Yes,—that dreadful illness! Lots of the children here had it—"

"I know,—it was epidemic."

"Yes, it was. Encephalitis lethargica."

The two girls gasped as these words fell easily from Mrs. Howland's tongue.

But Zizi said, quickly, "That's right. That's the scientific name for sleeping sickness."

"Yes, and Angela had it, and she slept and slept —oh, for days and nights—and years—and years—"

The clouded mind wandered a little, and Ida Campbell said:

"Must you bother her? Poor dear, it distresses her so."

"Must," Zizi said, doggedly. "And then your baby died—"

"They told me so, afterward,—but I was ill at the time. I didn't know anything about it till some time afterward."

"Never mind, I'll get all that from Doctor Avery," and Zizi nodded her sagacious little head. "Now, tell me more yet of the baby. Could she talk?"

"Oh, yes, she was five years old. But she couldn't talk plainly,—she didn't lisp exactly, but she had funny little words of her own."

"Was she a good child?"

"Yes, of course. But determined. And self-willed. Probably because as an only child she was overindulged by both her parents—"

"And her nurse as well?"

"Yes,—though Lane was more strict with her than I was. Nurse said it was for the baby's good, —and of course it was."

"How did she show this self-will? Cry?"

"Oh, no, Angela never was a cry-baby. But if she didn't like anything, she'd discard it. If she didn't like any visitor, she walk out of the room and refuse to come back. If I took her calling, and the people didn't please her, she'd declare she was going home,—and she'd go."

"All alone?"

"She'd run out of the door alone,—she was usually brought back,—or taken home."

"A's to nicknames?" It was Ida who spoke. "What did she call herself?"

"Andy,—always Andy."

"Did you ever hear of Ida Holmes?"

"Not till you came," Mary Howland smiled fondly at her. "You are Ida Holmes Campbell,—they say. But I know you are Angela. Don't you remember your babyhood at all? Don't you remember your little blue silk bonnet? With shirred brim and tiny pink roses? Don't you remember that?"

"Oh, yes,—I do!" and Ida's tone was eager.

But to Zizi's trained attention, the girl's eyes showed no recognition,—rather it was an effort to recall the bonnet, and a forced belief that she had done so. A real vision of that bonnet would have made Ida's eyes gleam suddenly.

"Now as to Conrad." Zizi had quite evidently made herself acquainted with all the points of the case. "Was he fond of the baby? Your baby?"

"Conrad is a strange boy," Mary Howland spoke rationally enough now; "he is harmless and he is devoted to all children and animals. Yes, he loved my baby, and I was never afraid to have him with her. But Mr. Howland objected to it, and so it was rarely allowed."

"Did he ever carry her?"

"Carry her? Oh, no! We would not have let

him do that. But he would sometimes walk beside her baby carriage or hover about when Lane had her out walking. I'm sure he never touched her."

"He did," said Ida, a little obstinately. "I have only the vaguest recollection of it, but I am sure that boy carried me somewhere—sometime."

"Anybody else with you?" asked Zizi, casually.

"No,—we were alone—it was dark,—"

"Oh, no, dear," and Mary Howland smiled. "That couldn't be. You dreamed it."

"It may be a childhood dream that has somehow stuck in your memory," Zizi said, thoughtfully. "Now I want to tackle Nurse Lane. Where can I see her?"

"Go and fetch her, Angela, won't you?" and Mary Howland turned to the girl she believed to be her daughter. "I want to hear anything Lane says."

Ida returned with the nurse, and it was easily seen that the woman came unwillingly.

"So you're a detective!" she began, as she looked scornfully at Zizi. "Fine looking one, I must say!"

"Yes, a fine one in every way," Zizi responded, coolly. "Moreover, I'm a mind reader,—so, if you please, Nurse Lane, speak the truth, or I shall know it!"

"Hoity-toity! A pert enough young miss! I'd like you to know that it's my habit to speak truth!"

"Stick to your habit then. What do you know of Ida Holmes?"

Only Zizi's eyes saw the least quiver of the stern

mouth of the nurse, for it was instantly quelled, and she said, in even tones, "I know nothing of the young lady, except that she appeared here with a preposterous story, claiming to be the child Angela, whom I used to nurse."

"Why do you think she isn't that child?"

"Because I saw the little one die and I saw her in her casket. How then can it be possible?"

"You saw her die?"

"I did."

"Who else was present?"

"No one else. Her mother was very ill, and Mr. Howland was at his wife's bedside."

"Did he know the little girl was so low?"

"I don't think so. But everything was so upset, Mrs. Howland was so very ill, the doctors were all driven to death by the epidemic, and nothing was normal."

"I see," and Zizi nodded. "It was all excitement and hurry, and the baby, who had been sleeping so long, just slipped away almost unobservedly."

"Just that, miss," Nurse Lane spoke reminiscently. "And the house all upside down, servants leaving just when they were needed most, we were very short-handed, and I had all I could do to keep things going at all. Then there were poor folks in the village who needed help, and Mr. Howland was a great man for benefactions. So it came about that I was all alone with our little girl when she died. It was not unlooked for, we had known what the end must be. Why, Doctor Avery had

time for no more than the shortest look-in, just to make sure that she was dead, then he had to go right back to Mrs. Howland. He told me to call Stryker—"

"The idiot!" exclaimed Zizi.

"Oh, no, ma'am, but the boy's father. He's our village undertaker. Well, he came as soon as he could, and he took the little body down to his rooms. There was many another poor little one taken there that night."

"And the casket was sent off to New Jersey that night?" Zizi asked.

"I don't know about that,—but it was sent off soon. It all sounds heartless, to tell of it,—but there was so much to do,—new cases breaking out all the time,—our duty was to the living—not to the dead."

"And you had the care of Mrs. Howland?"

"Oh, no, there were trained nurses for her,—four of them."

"But they had nothing to do with the little girl?"

"Nothing." Nurse Lane set her lips together. "I was in charge in the nursery and I wanted none of their help. And there was nothing to do," she added, by way of self-exoneration; "Doctor Avery had told me that."

"And Doctor Avery has told me that many times since," said Mary Howland, whose perfectly rational moments were becoming more and more frequent. "The doctor's story of my baby's death is exactly the same as Lane's. But I know now that Angela wasn't really dead,—only a deep sleep.

Poor Doctor Avery was worn out and nearly dead himself from overwork and exhaustion. So he let my baby be taken to the undertaker's, and she was put in her little casket,—but,—before that casket was put into the ground, somehow,—some way, my baby got out of it,—and here she is!"

The tone was one of triumph, and though the accompanying laughter had an hysterical ring, yet Mary Howland was in full control of her senses, and showed no sign of an unbalanced mind. She put her arm round Ida Campbell, and her glance bespoke defiance to any one who might try to separate them.

"Come with me, Nurse," and, jumping up suddenly, Zizi put her skinny little arm through the large round one of Lane. Surprised into acquiescence, the nurse went off with the strange girl, and they disappeared inside the house, just as Pennington Wise came into the sun parlor through an outside door.

"Will you introduce me to your mother, Miss—Howland?" he said, and, though he made a slight pause before the name, yet he spoke it clearly, and with a smile at Ida Campbell.

"Yes, indeed," she said gayly, and then, "Mother dear, this is Mr. Wise, the great detective who is going to get me my recognition and my rights."

"It doesn't matter," Mary Howland said, for, as always after a scent of excitement, she was tired and therefore a trifle less clear-minded, "you are my baby,—my darling, and nothing anybody can say or do can make you more so."

"But we want to make it clear to other people," Wise said, and then, turning to the girl, "Your mother is tired, don't let's bother her. Can you not leave her,—shortly, and go with me for a walk?"

"Yes, of course; I'll call Etta."

So Mary Howland was given over to her maid, while Ida Campbell willingly set forth with the detective.

"It's this way," Wise began, as they strolled across the terrace, down toward the orchard, "I am always attracted by a case with a double mystery. Here we have the death of Ralph Howland and the question of your own personality. I am by no means sure Mr. Howland was murdered,—and, I am by no means sure you are Angela Howland."

The big dark eyes turned to him in utter astonishment.

"Why," she cried, "why—Mr. Wise,—I thought you were going to help me. I thought—"

"I am going to help you,—but only if you are going to tell me the truth—and, all the truth. Are you ready to do that?"

The girl took several steps in silence, looking straight ahead of her.

Wise fell back a pace, and watched the graceful figure as she walked thoughtfully along. She wore no hat, but she was wrapped in a coat of soft gray material, edged with black fur.

Suddenly she drew the collar up, her little pointed chin sinking in the soft fur, and, turning quickly, she faced him.

"Mr. Wise, if you are a detective, you will know whether I tell you the truth or not."

"Not necessarily. If you make a statement that I cannot prove or disprove, I am not clairvoyant that I can know the truth. But why, Miss Campbell, should you tell anything but the truth?"

"Because the truth is not sufficient, such of it as is known, to carry my point,—to prove my case."

"And so you think to do it by resorting to falsehood?"

"Not falsehood,—oh, no!"

"What, then?"

"Oh, I don't know." She spoke almost pettishly. "Don't bother me with foolish questions, just let's get busy on the main issues."

"All right, we will. Where is Austin Magee?"

"I haven't the least idea,—no, wait, that isn't quite true. I have an idea,—but it is merely imagination on my part. Merely a thought,—fathered by a wish. And,—I expect you to believe this,—it is a thought better left unspoken,—unhinted at, until,—unless something transpires to show it's a right idea."

They were walking on again now, and the piquant little face that peeped out from the fur collar was looking at him warily,—it almost seemed cautiously.

Wise studied it. Delightfully oval of contour, fresh and rosy of coloring, ingenuously smiling. Yet his quick eye saw the touch of the make-up box, and his shrewd intelligence discerned the sophistication that showed in every glance, in each fleeting expression.

Lovely, Miss Ida Holmes Campbell certainly was,—but she was nobody's fool. More than that, she was positively capable of making other people her fools—if occasion arose.

It was not likely that she could make a fool of Pennington Wise, but, that astute gentleman reflected, she could come nearer to it than almost any one else he had ever seen,—and he must keep his wits about him.

"Can you walk as far as the village?" he asked.

"Rather! I often walk there and back. And a day like this I could walk to Jericho!" She drew up her fur with that nestling gesture that was so engaging, and they walked on at a slightly quickened pace.

On the way, they talked now of the case, and now of the country round about, and again of matters and things not connected with either.

But at any direct question, or at any subtle hint, Miss Campbell vouchsafed little or no definite information that helped Pennington Wise one iota.

They reached Normandale.

"Any objection to going to Stryker's?" asked Wise.

"Not the least; come along, it's on the next block."

To the undertaker's they went, and found the proprietor out, and the half-witted Conrad in charge.

"Do they let that innocent stay here alone?" Wise asked, in surprise.

"Oh, yes," said Ida. "There's nothing for him

to do, you know. He's just protection against petty thieves, I suppose."

"Conrad in charge," said the youth himself, with a wide vacant smile. "Father back soon,—Conrad looks after all—all right—all right."

He spoke in a peculiar sing-song, uninflected tone, and gave his words almost a rhythm by the use of repetition.

"Who is this, Conrad?" asked Wise, suddenly, indicating Ida.

"Andy,—little Andy, little, little Andy—"

"You know her?"

"Used to. Long ago,—long, long ago. Used to carry her—carry her—"

"Where did you carry her?"

"Through the street,—the village streets,—Main Street, Lee Avenue,—Carter Street,—Carter Street, —Carter Street—"

"Do stop him!" cried Ida. "I can't bear that crooning!"

"Nice Andy—nice, dear little baby Andy—"

"Don't touch me!" Ida cried, and then, as if fascinated, she looked into the half-wit's staring eyes. "I remember!" she cried, in a half-scared whisper; "I remember, Conrad,—do you?"

"Yes," he said.

CHAPTER XV

Utter Defeat

IDA HOLMES CAMPBELL was carrying things with a high hand. She declared herself mistress of Howlands, daughter of the house and inheritor of the estate.

Esterbrook told her no legal or positive settlements could be made until Magee could be found, or some other executor appointed by the courts, which would be a long and complicated process.

"Begin on it," Ida said, "and go ahead as fast as you can. Then if Mr. Magee turns up, there's no harm done."

The girl adjudged Mary Howland as unable to cope with the problems of housekeeping, and she herself assumed them, in so far as there were any outside of the province of the capable Martin. This admirable functionary was Ida's devoted slave, and his decisions always carried weight with the other servants.

Ida elected to sit at the head of the table, deciding that even that responsibility was too much for Mary Howland, and, as a matter of fact, Mary was relieved to be merely a passive member of the family.

The love and sympathy between the two who claimed to be mother and daughter was perfect and seemed to strengthen from day to day. In a

word, if this efficient and capable young woman were really Angela Howland she was only taking her right place and filling it to perfection.

If she were not,—then it was the biggest piece of barefaced effrontery that could well be imagined.

Leonard Swift fretted and fumed and used some very strong language, even in the hearing of the girl herself.

But she only laughed,—her light, ringing little laugh that charmed Swift, even while it exasperated him.

"Why don't you do something, Mr. Swift?" she mocked him. "Why don't you put me out? Why don't you prove I don't belong here? Why don't you make good your own claim?" Then she grew more serious. "The very fact, Leonard Swift, that you accept my presence here,—my authority here,—is because you know I am in my rightful place—"

"Nothing of the sort," he fairly sputtered; "rightful place, indeed! You are an impostor, and an adventuress! That's what you are! You're getting away with it for the moment,—but you're riding to a fall!"

A look of sudden fear came into Ida's eyes, but she quickly smiled and said gayly, "Then I must enjoy my ride before the fall comes! You're here as a visitor, Mr. Swift,—as my guest," she dropped him a saucy curtsey, "and while you may stay as long as it pleases you, remember you are but a guest."

"I'm not likely to forget it, while you're around,

—but, Miss—whoever you are! you won't be here very long!"

"No?"

"No! I am by no means idle in this investigation business,—I'm doing a little sleuthing on my own,—and if I were to tell you what I found in Magee's room—"

"What?" she breathed the word, as her face paled. "What?"

"Never you mind. I shall tell it only to Wise. He's the one to hear it."

"Where is Mr. Magee?" she said, so suddenly that he was taken by surprise.

"Why," he exclaimed, "don't you know?"

"No," she said, "I haven't the slightest idea where he is."

And there was a ring of truth in her voice, a look of sincerity in her eyes, that made Swift, rather a good reader of character, believe her implicitly.

Yet that very afternoon he met her unexpectedly coming out of the village post-office.

She looked flurried,—and had a furtive air, as if he were the last person in the world she wanted to meet just then. His curiosity was stirred, and, turning, he walked along by her side.

"Bothered?" he said, watching her closely. "A little anxious as to your plans working out?"

"My plans always work out," she said, coldly, and then with a sudden change of demeanor she smiled at him and looked up into his face with a confidential air.

"Let's be friendly," she said; "let's work together. Say we both try to find out the truth. If you can prove I'm *not* Angela, I'll renounce my claim."

"Nonsense, I haven't to prove anything. If you can prove you *are* Angela, I'll renounce my claim."

"Will you help me prove it, then?"

Now Leonard Swift wanted her claim proved about as much as he wanted another World War,—but her cajoling little face was beginning to mean a lot to him, and he let his eyes linger on it a second too long for his own powers of resistance.

"I'll help you," he said, impulsively, "and, at any rate, we may get at the truth."

"Let's go to see Conrad," said Ida, suddenly, as they neared the undertaker's shop.

"Oh, no;" Swift shuddered. "I can't bear that boy,—he gets on my nerves."

"Mine, too, but I want to see him. Come along."

And so weak-willed is the masculine sex against a pretty girl that Swift unwillingly followed her.

The undertaker's shop was of the old-fashioned type, not at all the modern burial parlors. Yet it was not unpleasant. The front room showed a few finished caskets on trestles, and through the open door to the back room could be seen the trimmer's bench and the carpenter shop.

Conrad sat in a big comfortable rocker by a window. It was his favorite haunt, and when not roaming about the village or across country, he was usually to be found there. Harmless and inoffensive, long years of training had enabled him to

"watch shop" and that was the only thing he could do.

He looked up at his visitors, and, without rising, began to rock vigorously and imitated the hushing of a child to sleep.

"There, there," he said soothingly, "all right,—all right. By, by, baby."

Ida looked at him, thoughtfully.

"He always does that when I come near him," she said. "To my mind, it proves he carried me about when I was little. I wish Nurse Lane would be decent to me. She could tell me a lot,—but she won't even speak to me on the subject."

"Proof against your story," Swift said, bluntly, for though unwillingly attracted to this buoyant young thing, he had no intention of believing in her veracity.

"Conrad," she said, suddenly, "you knew Mr. Howland?"

"Misser Howland? Yes, yes, oh,—yes! I liked him,—but he is dead."

"Who killed him?"

"Who? Who? Not angel lady,—no,—she loved him. Gay Girl? Maybe. Maybe. She was there,—oh, yes, Gay Girl was there."

Ida Campbell's eyes glistened. She knew Gay Girl was Edith Mills.

"No, no, of course Gay Girl didn't kill him. Who else was there?"

"All everybody. Company men and ladies.

Misser Magee, Misser Swift,—Martin,—oh,—all everybody."

"And you were on the porch all the time?"

"Long time,—for you see, bad storm,—oh, very bad storm."

"You remember it all?"

"All of all."

She turned to Swift.

"That chap knows more than we think. I believe he can give us some help. But I don't want to quiz him,—you do it."

"No, I don't want to, either. And it wouldn't mean anything. He was there, on the porch, throughout the storm. We know that. But nothing he could say would have any real weight."

"But if he saw it,—if he *saw* Mr. Howland killed,—it would probably make a more definite impression on his poor mind than ordinary occurrences, and he could tell—"

"No, let's go away,—I don't like his looks,—he may harm you."

And in truth, the half-wit had changed in manner. He rose from his chair, and stalked about the place, beating his long, strong arms against the air, and coming toward Ida Campbell, as he crooned, "Little Andy,—dear little baby Andy,—all right—all right—"

His eyes were wild, his face unpleasantly smiling, and Ida was glad to follow Swift's advice and leave the place.

"I'm going to call on the Garside girls, and you may go home," she said, as they reached the street.

"Oh, thank you!" he returned, and, raising his hat with a sardonic grin at this summary dismissal, he left her.

Though not yet taken up by many of the village people, Miss Campbell had made a number of friends, mostly the dear friends of Mary Howland. As she turned into the side street, Leonard Swift watched her a moment and then walked rapidly off in the direction of the post-office.

"Miss Campbell sent me here, to look at that telegraph message she sent about half an hour ago. She's afraid she made a mistake in the address. Let me see the copy, will you?"

"Sure," said the spinster postmistress,—"but it wasn't a telegram, it was a cablegram."

She spoke with pride, for cables were not of daily occurrence in Normandale.

"Yes, that's the one I mean," and in a moment Swift was reading the words that Ida Campbell had herself written just before he chanced to meet her coming out of the post-office.

And he read:

"To Austin Magee, Hotel L'Athenée, Paris, France." That was the address, and the message consisted of but one word, "Phonograph." There was no signature, and Swift stared at it.

Phonograph, he concluded at once, was merely a code word and might mean anything. But that very

morning Ida had told him, and he had believed her, that she had no idea where Magee was!

She had told a direct falsehood, and if she could do that with such a convincing air of innocence, she was a girl to beware of.

Impostor, of course. Adventuress, of course. In cahoots with Magee, of course. But more difficult to circumvent, more tricky to cope with than Swift had heretofore thought.

That evening Pennington Wise summoned them to the library to hear his report.

He had been on the case a little more than a week, but he had up to now divulged none of his findings.

He looked grave, as, sitting at Ralph Howland's desk, he watched his audience gather.

There were only Ida Campbell, Leonard Swift and Edith Mills to come in, but each of these showed an air of expectancy, and Wise scanned them with interest.

Esterbrook, the lawyer, was already in the library, as was also Zizi, the funny little assistant of the detective.

This strange girl, little more than a child, was like an elf or pixie. She roamed at will over the Howland house, she appeared suddenly from nowhere, and vanished as inexplicably.

Yet she was clever, intuitive, almost clairvoyant, and often caught hints or suggestions that but for her Wise would have missed.

"While I am not yet in possession of all the facts, nor am I through with my investigations," the de-

tective began, "yet I have discovered many important things. To begin with, I am positive that Ralph Howland was murdered,—and I have indications of evidence that points to the murderer."

Everybody looked startled.

"I didn't say evidence," Wise observed. "I said indications of evidence."

"My lay mind can't grasp the difference," said Swift, a little unpleasantly.

"Yet it's easy," Wise went on. "As is pretty well known, Mr. Howland was killed by the diabolically clever means of breaking a capsule or bulb of poison gas,—cyanogen, to be exact, right under his nose. This gas may be compressed into a tiny glass tube or bulb, and a mere whiff of it is instantly fatal."

"Excuse me," said Swift, more politely than he had spoken before, "why wasn't the murderer also affected by the fumes?"

"As I said, he was diabolically clever. Therefore he took precautions against such a happening. What they were I don't know, but it would be an easy matter for him to crush the tiny bulb under his victim's nose while he held his own nose until he could hasten to an open window."

"Or he could wear a gas mask," said Swift, thoughtfully.

"He could have done so, but that would have meant more elaborate preparation. I don't think we need any more evidence of this than the pieces of glass Miss Campbell found on his desk, and the tiny

cut on the cheek of the dead man, made, obviously, as his head fell forward in death."

"Strange Miss Campbell should have been the one to find those bits," Swift murmured, but if any one heard him no remark was made.

"Next," said Wise, "a few of those bulbs have been found"—he paused—"in the room of Mr. Austin Magee."

Leonard Swift's eyes seemed to bulge from his head. His expression was a mixture of surprise and ill-concealed triumph. He glanced at Ida.

She was calm and collected, but there was no sign of her habitual smile.

Esterbrook listened in a judicial silence.

"That is what I mean by an indication of evidence," Wise continued. "The finding of the incriminating bulbs may be evidence against Mr. Magee,—or they may have been placed there to indicate evidence against him."

"That's so," and Swift looked enlightened. "But, of course, Mr. Wise, *you* can distinguish between real and 'planted' clews?"

"I hope to, but the case is far from clear. Mr. Magee's inexplicable disappearance, his failure to arrange for the execution of the will, his disagreement with Mr. Howland regarding the mining project,—and, his possible collusion in the matter of bringing forward Miss Campbell as the heiress of the Howland estate all need inquiry."

"I should say so!" exclaimed Swift, and the more

conservative Esterbrook said, "It all looks peculiar to me."

"Now, that's where that matter stands," Wise said, as he noted the attitudes of his various hearers. "As you know, the question of Miss Campbell's identity is also part of my work here, and for the present, I am treating them as separate issues. I don't say they may not prove to be connected, but they require separate investigation. My assistant, Zizi, has been paying more attention to the latter than I have, for I have been engrossed with the murder mystery. Zizi has a theory,—maybe more than a theory, I may call it a discovery. But the application of it is so difficult of belief—"

"Not at all," Zizi said in her quiet, yet insistent way. "It would be far more difficult not to believe it. Here it is."

Zizi sat on a small chair, her thin little scrap of a figure hunched up together as she hugged her knees with her thin arms. She sat next Edith Mills and was a comical contrast to that well-nourished, almost robust young woman.

Zizi's birdlike head cocked itself around from one to another as she talked, and her equally birdlike black eyes darted from face to face.

"It's so easy," she said, "so plain. Here's your foolish Conrad with a mania for letting caged things free. Why, he let out the canary bird the night of Mr. Howland's death. I'm told that's a fact."

Both Esterbrook and Swift nodded assent.

"Well, then, he is in the habit of tending shop at his father's rooms. During that awful epidemic, when all was turmoil, haste and confusion, the little Angela, supposed dead, was in her white casket at the shop. Conrad, in charge, heard a sound, and flew to liberate the imprisoned child. He opened the casket, took out the awakening baby, and—"

"I, for one," exclaimed Swift, "refuse to listen to any more of this balderdash!"

"You may be excused, then," and Zizi's eyes flashed at him. "The story must be told. Then that boy, who had heard,—who knew that Angela Howland was to be sent away on the train,—then he, with his poor beclouded brain working as best it could,—he carried her to the railroad station."

"Bless my soul!" cried Esterbrook, "how do you know that?"

"Here's how I know it. Conrad said he carried the baby through the streets,—through Main Street, —Lee Avenue, Carter Street,—and that route, from Stryker's shop, leads as you all know, direct to the station!" She looked around triumphantly. "Then, the poor half-witted boy put the little one on the train, and, to his broken mind, he thought he had done what he calls 'all right—all right—all right.' Then, you see, Miss Jane Campbell found the baby, —in her berth,—where Conrad had placed the child. Then,—and here's the point of it all, then Miss Jane Campbell waited to hear of a lost child. Seeing nothing in the papers of such a thing, she advertised for herself, but got no replies. Why? Be-

cause nobody supposed the Howland baby was missing!"

Esterbrook was a logical-minded lawyer, of judicial temperament. Moreover, he was quick of decision. He gave Zizi a look of the most utter scorn that she had ever experienced. As she told Wise afterward, it blighted her very soul.

"Pure poppycock," Esterbrook said. "Absolute rubbish. As your lawyer, Mr. Swift, I advise you to put a stop to this sort of investigation."

"I certainly shall," and Swift's tone was as decided as his adviser's. "Mr. Wise, you may continue the case, if you choose, but I must ask you to allow no further foolishness of this sort from your young helper."

"But it's true!" cried Ida Campbell, her face flushed with excitement, "it's true! I remember it! It all comes back to me!"

"You'd say that, anyway," put in Edith Mills, contemptuously. "Tell me, Miss Ida Campbell, didn't you say to Mrs. Howland the other day, 'If we play our cards right, we'll yet make them believe I'm Angela!' Didn't you say that? But you needn't answer, for you'd only deny it, whereas I heard you say it,—I swear it."

As Edith Mills's abnormally acute hearing was well known, nobody doubted her statement. Least of all Ida Campbell herself, for she knew she had said that very thing.

"And anyway," Pennington Wise summed up, "if all this assumption of Zizi's should be true, if Con-

rad did liberate the baby and carry her to safety, it is no proof that Miss Campbell is the baby in question."

The face of Ida Campbell was a study. Fleeting expressions of hope and despair, of possible success and blank failure alternated on her changing countenance while her eyes traveled round the room, vainly seeking a friend.

"The jig is up," Swift said to her, bluntly, "but I ask permission to take Miss Campbell out of the room for a moment, before the matter goes any further."

As if incapable of resistance the girl followed him to the next room. "Miss Campbell," he began, quickly, "Ida,—your plot has failed,—your scheme has fallen through. Now here's your way out. Give up all claim to inheritance or heirship, admit you're not Angela, but—stay here as—my wife."

"Oh," she gasped, "oh—oh—" and the look of utter abhorrence in her lovely eyes answered him.

"Then go!" he exclaimed, furious at her scorn. "Go—"

"I shall not go! I will stay and yet prove—"

"Stay"—he whispered low—"stay—and prove Austin Magee a murderer!"

This told. There was a moment's silence, and then a broken, a pitiful little voice said,—"I'll go,—yes, I'll go."

And, in triumph, Swift led her back to tell of her utter defeat. Nor did any one combat her decision or espouse her cause.

CHAPTER XVI

Swift's Ultimatum

YET not as a vanquished combatant did Ida Holmes Campbell leave the library and go upstairs to her own room.

She walked out with a firm step, with her proud little head held high and her hazel eyes glinting with defiance, even though the hot tears were already welling up in them.

She composed herself sufficiently to go in and say good night to Mary Howland in her usual cheery manner.

"Dear, dear Angela," Mary said, as the girl clasped her in a closer embrace than ever before. "How dear you are to me."

"Shall we give it up and go away from here, mother? Or shall we continue our fight to stay?"

"As you choose, my darling. I want whatever you want. But you are worried,—anxious,—what has happened?"

"Nothing. It's all right. Good night, now, mother,—sweetheart,—here comes Lane to look after you."

The old nurse entered, a flame of jealousy lighting her eyes as she saw the affectionate parting.

"I'm told you're shown up,—Miss Campbell," she said, insolently.

"Nurse"—and instead of exhibiting resentment the girl went close to Lane and put her hands on her shoulder—"Nurse, dear, you can save me. *Why* won't you? *You* know I am Angela,—you have real proof and you withhold it. For the sake of mother,—for the sake of the little baby you used to love,—won't you tell what you know?"

The soft voice was coaxing, even wheedlesome, and Lane's grim features relaxed a trifle as she gazed into the beseeching eyes.

But the very nearness of that eager little face showed to the old-fashioned, conservative woman the touch of rouge on the cheek, the slight hint of carmine on the quivering lips, and her heart hardened toward this young sinner.

"Not the little Angela I loved,—no, never could she grow up to be a brazen-faced, painted hussy like you! Be off with you to your room and I hope you'll soon be off from this house!"

Recoiling, as if from a blow, the girl silently left the room and slipped away to her own apartments.

In her pretty boudoir, with its rose-shaded night light, she flung herself on a couch and buried her face in a nest of soft pillows.

Here she gave way to a veritable storm of weeping. Not merely tears, but great, convulsive sobs, that seemed to tear her slender frame to pieces. Unheeding, she had left her door ajar, and Edith Mills coming up, hesitated at the threshold, impelled to go in.

But the girl's abandonment of woe was so great

that Edith, out of honest compassion, thought she'd be better alone, and tiptoed away.

Half an hour later, Leonard Swift came upstairs.

Ida was still crying, but the deep sobs had given place to little fluttering, choking gasps,—pathetic little sounds, that told of exhausted nature as well as of a despairing heart.

Involuntarily, Swift went to the slightly open door and listened.

He hesitated, looked about the dimly lighted hall, and then, after a light almost inaudible tap on the panel, he stepped inside.

"Ida,—my darling girl,—let me comfort you," he whispered, as he bent over her.

She raised her head, and then angrily sprang to her feet and faced him.

"Mr. Swift! How dare you? Go away at once!"

Instead of which, Leonard Swift fairly snatched her into his arms and covered her tempestuous little face with kisses.

And then, frightened himself at what he had dared to do, he held her off at arm's length and whispered,

"There, my beauty, what have you to say now?"

He quailed before the dignity and scorn she showed. She deigned no word, but with a gesture that would have graced a great tragedy actress, she pointed to the door.

Yet Swift was not so easily managed.

"Now, now," he said, "be sensible. Sit down a minute and let's talk things over. This is your sit-

ting-room, isn't it? You can receive me here,—it isn't very late,—and I've a few words I must say to you, a few things you'll be glad to hear."

"I don't want to hear anything from you," and she still pointed to the door.

"Oh, pshaw! Just because I kissed you,—well,—I couldn't help it, it was your own fault for looking so confounded pretty. But if you'll listen to a dozen words, I'll guarantee you'll want me to go on with my talk. First, Miss Ida Holmes Campbell, do you realize that you're utterly friendless—and alone? Mary Howland doesn't count, Nurse Lane is against you, Esterbrook is, too. Wise and his little girl are sure you're an impostor—"

"No, oh, no!"

"Yes, they are. Edith is down on you,—there's nobody to take your part unless you let me do so."

"Rather than have you do that, I'd—"

"Wait a minute,—wait a minute, now. I say there's nobody to take your part unless you let me, —and, there's no one to take Magee's part—unless I do."

She stared at him, wide-eyed, while her lips quivered in torture.

"Yes, ma'am! That strikes home, doesn't it? You little fool! What do you see in Austin Magee to bring that look to your eyes? Damn him! Tell me,—how could he win you,—in those few weeks—But you'll never see him again!"

"You said—you'd befriend him—"

"Not that exactly. The only way to befriend Magee is to let him alone. I know where he is—"

"Where?"

"You know, too. He's in Paris,—hiding from the consequences of his—well, never mind putting the crime into words. Now, here's the whole thing in a nutshell,—you marry me, and you can be mistress of Howlands, without any more trouble. You can have Mary Howland here with you. And,—your precious Magee will be left unmolested by me,—or by the police, so long as he keeps out of this country."

"What are you talking about? He did no crime? He's in no danger!"

"Oh, isn't he? That's all *you* know about it! I know a lot, that the Wise fool doesn't dream of. And, this I swear to you, I'll track Austin Magee to the chair,—unless you give me,—right now,—your promise to marry me. Why I fell so hard for you, I don't know. I think it's your proud, dauntless little spirit even more than your posy face. But I love you like a house afire! You are no more Angela than you're the Queen of Sheba,—and you know it! You made up the plan,—or rather, you agreed to the plan Magee devised, and—it didn't work, that's all. So he went off and left you to shift for yourself. Better let me shift for you. Listen to reason. I know you're a fraud and a fake, but if you marry me, I won't tell. If you don't—"

The shrugged shoulders of the man told plainly how relentless his revenge would be.

Ida Holmes Campbell took a step backward.

She looked at the man in front of her with cool appraisal, almost as if he were some strange specimen of natural history.

"Have you finished?" she asked.

"Yes," he said, "that is my ultimatum."

"And this is mine. I reject your offer of marriage. I decline your offer of friendship. I have no interest whatever in your future proceedings or machinations, and—I defy you! More, I scorn you! Yes, I scorn you too much even to detest you,—I consider you too worthless, too insignificant,—even to resent your kissing me. One does not resent an insult from a nonentity!"

She stood, like a small but very superior goddess, and the disdain in her fearless eyes was unmixed with any apprehension or even interest.

And, such is the inconsistency of man, Leonard Swift's love for her increased tenfold.

"You wonder!" he breathed, lost in admiration of this slip of a girl who dared him so dauntlessly. "Good night for now, but don't think for a minute I'm giving you up. I'll win you yet,—or, what happens toAustin Magee will make you wish I had!"

He went softly away, and as Ida mechanically closed the door after him, Edith Mills' door also closed noiselessly.

But Edith Mills could hear through closed doors, and she knew, if no one else did, that all through that night Miss Campbell alternately walked the floor or lay softly sobbing on her bed.

Yet the next morning it was a very composed and collected young woman who went downstairs, attired in street costume.

The little figure, in a smart black tailor-made costume, with fringes of monkey fur, and a saucy tricorne hat, left the house and walked alone to the village.

She presented herself at the Normandale Inn, where Pennington Wise was staying.

"I've come to talk business, Mr. Wise," she said, after preliminary greetings.

"No one I'd rather see, Miss Campbell," and Wise politely saw her settled comfortably and then sat down facing her.

"Yes, let's talk business," and appearing, as usual, out of nothingness, Zizi crouched on an ottoman at Ida's side.

Her eerie black eyes fastened themselves on the visitor, and her thin little fingers twined among the monkey fringes of Ida's gown.

"How frank are you going to be with me, Miss Campbell?" and Wise smiled genially at her.

"As frank as you wish,—I wonder how frank you want me to be."

"Diplomatic young person! Suppose you tell me all you know—"

"And then will you do all you can?"

"You bet I will! Nothing I'd like better!"

"But I know so little."

"I suppose you know whether you're Angela Howland or not."

"No, I don't,—I haven't the slightest idea."

"H'm. Does anybody know?"

"Nobody, unless it's old Granny Green."

"She being an imaginary confidant?"

"Oh, no; she's a real person. But she's a bit unsatisfactory. Stone deaf, stone blind—"

"And probably stone broke!"

"Likely. But none of these things bother her. However, I've tried and I can't get anything out of her. And she'll keep—"

"I suppose she has kept a good many years already."

"Ninety or so. But, Mr. Wise, can't you find out whether I'm Angela or not?"

"Do you think you are?"

"I—I think so with my heart,—but not with my mind."

"Well,—let's have details."

"You know most of them. But, the trouble is, when they accuse Mr. Magee of a—"

"Plot—scheme?"

"Yes,—but I don't like those words. However, here's how it came about. You know how he found me—through the dentists' journals, and then, when he came to see me,—he saw no reason to suppose I might be Angela Howland except my separated front teeth. So,—he said,—"

"Let's make a stab at it!"

Ida laughed. "Well, it was almost that. You see there was my story of Miss Campbell's finding me—"

"Did Magee believe all that?"

"Oh, yes,—that part's true—"

"What part isn't true?"

"I didn't mean it that way,—but,—oh, well, anyway, Mr. Magee was so anxious to find Angela—"

"And so anxious that you should be Angela—"

"That anxiety came later." She took his words seriously. "At first, of course, Mr. Magee thought only of finding his employer's child. And what you people call the plot was made up before we—Mr. Magee and I—"

"Fell in love with each other," Zizi supplied, quietly.

"Yes; and he said that I'd better go to Howlands and see if they felt that I *was* their child. He was sure my father would know, even if my mother didn't."

"But you never saw Ralph Howland."

"No; he died while we were planning this thing. You see, I hated to go on such an uncertainty. And Mr. Magee said the trial could do no harm, even if they failed to keep me. And he did say that if I went I must claim to be Angela for that might help along to find out the truth. I never meant to claim my heritage fraudulently—"

"Of course you didn't," and Zizi patted Ida's hand that she held in her own two little claws.

"Well, then after Mr. Howland died, Mr. Magee said there was all the more reason for me to go, to comfort my mother—"

"If she is your mother."

"Yes; and Mr. Wise, that's what I want you to find out. Surely you can do it. Surely you believe my story of the corals, still in Australia, of the little clothes there, too,—oh, I wish I could go there and get them!"

"Come on," Zizi cried, "I'll go with you!"

"I doubt if I could find them."

"But they're in storage—"

"Yes,—but it wasn't a regular storage warehouse, —it was just a room in a neighbor's house,—and the people may all be dead or moved away. It was sixteen years ago."

"Do you know, Miss Campbell," and Wise looked at her very seriously, "your story carries weight with me,—just because it has no weight at all!"

Zizi clapped her skinny little hands. "Of course it does!" she cried. "Why, if it wasn't true,—if it was a made-up yarn, she'd say she was sure of her identity, and she'd made up a plausible reason for not going to Australia, but she'd vow the things were there. Also she'd have a lot of data—"

"Whereas she has almost none," said Wise.

"But I have," Ida said. "I mean Miss Jane told me she put it all on record. She said she took the records to France with her, and yet, when I went over her papers, before I came away I couldn't find any about me. I had another idea—"

"Look here, Miss Campbell, did Mr. Magee kill Ralph Howland?"

"Oh, Mr. Wise!" and the girl's face blanched, "what an awful thing to say! Of course not!"

"Yet some of those bulbs were found in his room—"

"Then they were put there—"

"Not likely. Who could do such a thing?"

"The murderer, of course."

"That would imply a person familiar with the house, and with unquestioned access to Mr. Magee's room."

"All the servants have that."

"This crime is too deep for the mental caliber of a servant."

"Or not deep enough," Zizi interrupted. "I fully believe it was that Conrad who did it. He's an idiot in some ways, but fearfully shrewd in others."

"He couldn't get the things—"

"Yes, he could, Penny. Now listen. He's always around the doctors' offices, he's in and out of the drug shop, he's on a familiar footing with every household in the village or on the outskirts, where the big estates are. You see, that chap could obtain those capsules or bulbs or whatever they are more easily than anybody else could."

"Could he secrete them in Austin Magee's room?" asked Ida eagerly. "Would he have wit enough to do it?"

"He might if he were himself in danger of being accused. That type of dementia is often possessed of great cunning."

"Mr. Magee, you know what Zizi said about Conrad letting the baby out of the casket. Well, I remember it now,—it comes back to me."

Wise shook his head, kindly. "Be careful how you claim memories after they're suggested to you. If you had remembered that before it was told by some one else it would have been important. But—it's easy to recollect suggested memories."

"But I do,—I do remember being carried swiftly through the dark night and taken into the lighted railroad train."

"Oh, come now, the train wasn't so very light at midnight, and so long ago, they had very little light on the cars, anyway."

Wise watched her closely, and Zizi said, "He's trying to catch you,—look out."

"I do remember it," Ida said doggedly.

"Go on, then, what happened next? Do you remember the lady who took you home with her? I mean do you remember her on the train?"

Ida tried hard, but could evolve no definite memory from the vague and distant past, and Zizi sighed.

"It's so near being a clear case," she lamented, "and yet it's not clear at all."

"I think," said Ida, slowly, "if I could talk to Conrad again, with all this in mind, I might stir some dormant memories."

"Well, we can go round and see him," Wise proposed. "I don't want to leave a stone unturned."

"And then," Ida went on, "I want to try once more to win Nurse Lane over. She knows more than she will tell. I can't help feeling she can prove the truth. But she hates me."

"Why?"

"I don't know of any reason but a foolish jealousy of my mother's love for me. Lane is a queer woman, but I've not yet quite despaired of getting round her somehow."

At Wise's further suggestion the three started for the undertaker's shop.

About halfway there, they met Leonard Swift, walking rapidly.

"Mr. Wise!" he exclaimed, "the very man I want. Conrad, the half-wit is dead. And Doctor Avery, who is there, thinks it's a case similar to Ralph Howland's. Come along, quickly. Miss Campbell, let me take you home, won't you?"

"I will not," and Ida spoke decidedly. "Who killed the poor chap?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. I came down from the post-office, and as I passed the shop I saw a crowd gathering, and saw Doctor Avery arriving, so I went in too."

Refusing Swift's further insistence that she go home, Ida pressed through the crowd to get a glimpse of the poor unfortunate boy.

Conrad sat in his old rocking-chair, where he had sat so often, and except that his head drooped he looked quite as he had looked in life.

John Stryker, the undertaker, was heartbroken. His afflicted son had been the apple of his eye. To the doting father the boy had been an unfortunate but none the less dear and none the less to be loved and cherished. Nor had the villagers ever scoffed

at or spurned the boy. He was welcomed at any house in the village, and none had an ill word to say of him.

"He wasn't killed, doctor," Stryker was saying; "don't tell me he was killed! Who would kill my poor innocent? My poor dear Connie?"

"We'll see, John," and Doctor Avery spoke gravely. "I'll have to call Mason over. You go home, man, I'll take charge here."

And, reluctantly, the stricken father went.

CHAPTER XVII

The Chemist's Statement

PENNINGTON WISE was confronted with one of the greatest puzzles of his whole career.

To his pleasant sitting-room at the cheery little inn came one after another to talk to him, and from none could he learn any helpful facts.

"Facts enough," he said to Zizi, "but none of them of any use. Now the logical murderer of Ralph Howland is, of course, Magee. He had motive—"

"What was his motive?" Zizi demanded.

"To get his share of the inheritance, to put the fake Angela in power, and then to marry her. Clean-cut proceeding enough, if the girl had carried through, as he had instructed her. But when she declared herself an impostor, he saw his game was up and ran away."

"Maybe he went to France to hunt up those records of Ida's guardian."

"To begin with, those records are imaginary. Second, if his departure was for any honest purpose, he would have left word or sent word as to the estate and all that."

"Maybe he hadn't time—"

"What ails you, Ziz? You're not so clear-headed in this matter as you usually are. You're prejudiced in Ida's favor because you've taken a fancy to the girl. Now, she has practically admitted that she has no reason to think she's the missing baby. That yarn about Conrad carrying her to the train you made up yourself—"

"It must be true, Penny—"

"May be, not must be,—with the probabilities all against it."

"Well, at least, look in some other direction. What about Leonard Swift?"

"As the murderer?"

"Yes."

"Zizi, you're crazy. Swift had no reason to kill his cousin. He's the heir, to be sure, but men don't kill their relatives just to inherit more quickly. There isn't a shred of evidence against Swift, he's a decent citizen, and it's only because you don't like his personality that you are down on him."

"Maybe. But his personality is far from attractive."

"To you, perhaps. Not to everybody. But now we have the Conrad death to look into as well. The doctors pronounce it murder, and by the same means as were employed to do for Howland. You don't suspect Swift of this thing too, do you?"

"Oh, Penny, don't be cross with me! I'm only trying to look into things. But, on the other hand, Magee couldn't have done it, could he?"

"Why not? I don't believe Magee is far away.

That girl could have sent a cablegram to Paris as a blind,—and I believe she did. I dare say Magee is hanging around near here—"

"But why would he kill Conrad?"

"Here's why. Whoever killed the half-wit is the same one who killed Howland. And the reason is because Conrad saw Howland's murder done and threatened to tell."

"But that idiot boy couldn't tell—"

"That's just it. He has decidedly lucid intervals, and I've talked to him myself when he seemed just on the verge of giving out most important information and then his mind would wander off again. But the more he was questioned the more he seemed to remember. And I was just about to interview him regarding that baby affair! You see, if Magee made up the whole plot of palming the girl off as the daughter then he would have to make everything bend to the furtherance of his scheme. Now, having Howland out of the way, he feared only Conrad,—so he had to go too."

"Don't believe it," and Zizi looked stubbornly dubious. "I'm sure there's something we've overlooked,—something important—"

And then Edith Mills arrived.

"May I come in?" she said, as Zizi opened the door to her knock.

"Yes, indeed," said Wise, rising to greet her.

"I do want a talk with you two alone," she said, as she loosened her furs. "I feel I ought to tell you some things."

"If you can tell anything to throw light on our problems, it is surely your duty to do so, Miss Mills," Wise told her.

"I know it, and while I've nothing much or definite to tell, it may be of help. It's about the sincerity of Ida Campbell. Do you think, Mr. Wise, that she believes she is Angela Howland?"

"No," said Wise, and "Yes," said Zizi, simultaneously.

Edith Mills looked from one to the other.

"You two don't always agree, then?"

"We rarely agree," said Zizi, making a saucy face at Wise.

"What do you think on that point, Miss Mills?" the detective asked. "You have opportunities of judging,—as you are in the house."

"I think she is determined to put the thing over. Why, every morning you can see new determination in her face, as if she said to herself, I will succeed in this thing,—I will! And then, as the day goes on, and she meets with rebuff or difficulty, her courage fails, and she droops with discouragement, only to start fresh the next day."

"You're a bit of a psychologist, Miss Mills."

"Yes,—in a small way. But these phases of Ida's are obvious enough. Now,—if you please, she has so successfully vamped Leonard Swift that he is in love with her,—or thinks he is. She spurns him, but that only piques his interest. She knows that, and she holds him off,—even while she is drawing him on."

"You seem to understand the vamping process,—" Wise smiled at her.

"What girl doesn't, nowadays," and the big gray eyes gazed miserably at Wise. Clearly, Edith Mills was distressed at the situation.

"I might as well own up, Mr. Wise,—I care for Leonard Swift myself. I am sure he cared for me, —before that girl came along, with her painted cheeks and her cigarettes! Len fell for all that sort of thing, because he thinks it's smart and clever work. So then Ida made up to him and actually ensnared him—"

"How do you know?" asked Zizi; "just from her telling you?"

"Oh, no, my child, I wouldn't trust to that. But I heard him. You know there's little that goes on in that house that I don't hear. I can't help it, I hear through walls or closed doors, without trying. Well, I heard Leonard begging her to marry him, and she treated him like the dirt under her feet. That's what makes me mad!"

"You wouldn't rather she accepted him?" said the astute Zizi.

"No, but she will do that in the end. Why wouldn't she? She'll never prove her identity,—because—"

"Because what?" asked Wise.

"Because she isn't Angela,—she's Ida Holmes."

"How do you know, and who is Ida Holmes?"

"I don't know who Ida Holmes is—but I know she's a real person. I often hear Nurse Lane mut-

tering at night. My room is opposite hers, across a narrow hall, and she mutters and murmurs constantly. And I thought I wouldn't tell of it, but since that girl has—"

"Has annexed Swift," Zizi helped her out.

"Yes; I'm ready to tell anything I know against her."

"If it's true," suggested Wise.

"It is true. And it's this. Night after night Nurse Lane goes over these words. Ida Holmes,—Ida Holm. Sometimes she says Holm and sometimes Holmes. Then she says, 'She is—she must be—Ida Holmes. But I won't have it! No, I'll never admit it.' Over and over she says that, with a slight variation, such as, 'I'll never tell,' 'I won't let anybody know,' and that sort of thing over and over."

"I've always thought that nurse knew something of importance—"

"Oh, she does! Whatever it is, whoever Ida Holmes may be, she can't be Angela Howland."

"Are there any Holmses about here?" Wise asked. "Could there have been a Holmes baby who was ill at the time of the epidemic?"

"You see," Zizi explained, earnestly, "there's no doubt but Conrad carried a child from the shop to the railroad station by the streets he mentioned. Main Street, Lee Avenue, Carter Street. That was firmly fixed in his brain."

"But it wasn't Angela Howland, it was Ida Holmes—"

"But who is Ida Holmes?" Wise repeated.

"There are Holmeses about here," Edith said, "and I've looked into the matter, but I can't learn of any Ida. I haven't liked to seem too curious, but I want you, Mr. Wise, to make inquiries. First of all, I think you ought to make Nurse Lane tell what she knows,—it would spike the guns of that girl, anyway!"

"You think her an impostor, then?"

"Of course she is! Magee made the plan, she fell in with it, and now,—"

"Did Mr. Magee kill Mr. Howland?" Wise asked.

Edith Mills paused.

"I'd hate to say that," she said, "and yet I can't help thinking he did. You see, he started the whole business of the baby's body being removed from the casket. Nobody ever verified that. Maybe he made it all up."

"But that was before Mr. Howland died."

"Yes,—but Austin Magee is deep and very clever. Moreover, he insisted on being executor of Mr. Howland's estate. I know, because I was there,—I typed the will. Oh, I can't help knowing all the Howland affairs. A stenographer has to. And then, when Mr. Magee raised the question of Angela being still alive, naturally Mr. Howland was crazy to have it come true. He wouldn't let Mrs. Howland know until there was a positive assurance."

"Was she all right mentally, then?"

"Yes. Melancholy, but perfectly sound-minded. It was the shock of Mr. Howland's death that made

her what she is now. But she's getting better all the time. That girl has a splendid effect on her. So, Mr. Wise, don't you see how fine it would be if you could just prove that Ida is Ida Holmes, and has nothing to do with the Howlands, then Mrs. Howland could take her share of the estate, could take Ida as companion, and go away—"

"Leaving you with a clear field in regard to Mr. Swift," put in Zizi.

"Yes," and Miss Mills' calm gray eyes looked at Zizi acquiescently. "This is no wrongdoing on my part,—I simply want the truth. And I want Leonard Swift, who was already mine when this vamp appeared on the scene!"

"Here comes your friend now," and from the window Pennington Wise saw Swift approaching.

"Hello," Swift said, as he came in, "you here, Edith? Good day, Miss Zizi. Wise, I've fresh information. I've been doing a little sleuthing myself, and I've found a German chemist who makes those poison gas things."

"Where?" and Wise showed his interest.

"He has a queer little laboratory in a sort of shanty up on the Marslake road. I've not been there, but I heard rumors of it, and I inquired at the post-office as to his address. Then I waited around, and he came for his mail, and I tackled him. Good work, what? Well,—the result was—er,—informative, at least."

"And it was?"

"That he made those bulbs for Magee."

"Good work, indeed, to find that out!" said Wise, appreciatively. "How did he come to tell you?"

"I frightened him into it. He denied it all at first, and when I told him he'd be suspected of murder himself if he didn't come across with the facts, he admitted that Magee asked him to make them and he did."

"What did Magee tell him he wanted them for?"

"Oh, the usual excuse, to kill a dog. Said it was a great bulldog and they wanted to put it out of the way painlessly. So Helmstadter, that's his name, gave him several. He is a morose, surly old customer, and I don't believe he gave the matter a thought in any curious way. It's all in the day's work with him."

"Give me his exact address, and I'll go to see him," said Wise, as he jotted down the directions Swift gave him.

"You see," Swift went on, "I hate like the devil to accuse Magee, but what else can we think?"

"And as to the Conrad murder?" Wise said.

"Magee's work," Swift returned. "Sorry, but what other theory is possible? Austin is about here somewhere, hiding, but in communication with Miss Campbell,—of that there can be no doubt."

"Then the bulbs that were found in Magee's room were his own,—and not planted there?"

"Say it yourself. Who could have put them there? I can't see any way out for Austin Magee. The thing is to find him."

"If he's in Paris—"

"Not he! That cablegram was a clever trick. I'll bet anything you like it never was delivered. Well, there's my contribution to your investigation. Do what you like with it. But if you're hunting the murderer of Ralph Howland and of Conrad Stryker, one name will answer both questions."

"And Miss Ida Campbell? Is she too a fraud?"

"Rather!" Swift spoke emphatically. "And she's weakening. She'll give up the struggle any time now. She hasn't a friend to back her, except Mary Howland, who is not to be considered. And the game is too absurd. I think Magee had a notion of Conrad's finding one of the babies alive, and he made up the whole Jane Campbell yarn right out of the solid. Then he taught it to this girl—"

"How did he find her?"

"Through that dentist business. That part is all true. . . . You know dentists keep very accurate records nowadays, and those dental journals are read widely. . . . It's a wonder he didn't have a hundred answers. But he probably had a lot, and he selected the most promising and instructed her carefully as to her procedure and then sent her here."

"After Howland's death."

"Of course, after Howland's death. He never could have fooled Ralph Howland! Nor could he have fooled Mary, except that her mind is not capable of judging truly. Now, you prove the girl is not Angela, and then prove that Magee is responsible for these two crimes,—and your work is done."

"What sort of a man is Magee?" Wise inquired.

"Have you never seen him? Well, he's one of the quiet sort. Minds his own business, keeps his own counsel—"

"Very ambitious," Edith Mills put in. "Over-ambitious. His one idea in life is his own advancement, his own importance."

"I see. Well, you two people have certainly given me something new to work on. I'll see your German chemist, Mr. Swift, and perhaps learn more details."

"All right,—come along, Edith," and the two departed.

"The plot thickens," said Wise to his assistant, "and as it thickens, curiously enough, it also clears! The end is not yet,—to be sure, but the end is in sight."

"Do you suppose those two are telling the truth?" and Zizi hugged her knees, as she rocked back and forth on her ottoman. She rarely sat on a chair,—she was too little for most chairs, but she always found some little hassock or stool,—if not, she would fling a cushion on the floor and sit on that.

"Truth is a big word, Ziz. Few people can tell it."

"Now you're getting epigrammatic, so I know you're in a good humor, so I know things are working out!"

"You're right, my child, things are working out! By the way, that's important stuff Miss Mills divulged,—about the babbling old nurse, I mean."

"Y-yes,—but, Penny, there *isn't* any Ida Holmes."

"No? Who told you so?"

"Your mamma told my mamma and my mamma told me!" with which not very lucid statement she lapsed into a thoughtful silence.

At length, she broke it to say,

"Penny, you find out about the German chemist, and I'll track down Ida Holmes. How's that for equal division of labor?"

"It goes," Wise returned, "and I'll start now."

"I will, too," and these two earnest investigators took their separate ways.

Wise procured an automobile and had himself driven out to the address Swift had given him.

He found a decent enough old house, with a shack or shanty that was evidently the laboratory. It seemed too dignified a name for the little building, but on entering, Wise found that inside it was a marvel of compactness, with tools and appliances in perfect working order.

"Mr. Helmstadter?" inquired the detective, as he approached an old man who sat on a high stool at a work table.

"Ja,—vat iss?"

"May I have a short interview with you, sir? My name is Wise."

"Weiss, eh,—a goot name."

"I am a detective, and I make my inquiries in the interests of law and justice."

"Law unt justice,—they are goot things."

The old man's attitude was not surly, so much as disinterested. He was civil enough, but he was quite evidently impatient to return to his work.

"I won't detain you long," Wise assured him. "Tell me this. You can make poison gas bulbs?"

The old man looked at him shrewdly from under his bushy gray eyebrows.

"Ja. That is not a great stunt!"

"No?"

"Not for a chemist who knows his business. One heats some dry cyanide of mercury to a low redness in a glass tube. The gas is collected over the mercury, which volatilizes and condenses on the colder part of the apparatus."

"And it is deadly?"

"A bulb, which haf in it two cubic centimeters, could send you to the next world."

"I dare say. I'm in no haste to go, though. Now for the business. You make these things to order?"

"That iss to put it queerly. But, yes, I did make some to order a time ago."

"For whom?"

"For Mr. Magee,—he iss the secretary of Mr. Howland."

"Yes. And why did he want them?"

"He said to kill a fery large dog."

"You believed him?"

"It vas not my beesness. He said so,—ja, I believed him, why not?"

"Yet one of those,—perhaps two of them,—were used to murder human beings!"

The German shrugged his shoulders.

"That is not my affair. I did not kill anybody."

"No. Was Mr. Magee secretive about this? Did he ask you not to tell?"

The old man looked surprised. "No, he said nottings of the sort. He asked for the goods, I delivered them, he paid me. All is said."

"You're sure the customer was Austin Magee?"

"He said so."

"Describe the man?"

And the description of the chemist's customer was so accurate that there could be no doubt it was meant for Austin Magee.

CHAPTER XVIII

On Record

ONE was less than nineteen and one was over ninety, but the two were hobnobbing like cronies, and the snapping black eyes of the girl were no more piercing than the beady black eyes of the old woman.

"Tell me the whole story," Zizi commanded. "Conrad is dead, you can do him no harm, and you can do other people a world of good. Come now, out with it!"

Granny Green, for all her ninety years, for all her blindness and deafness was nobody's fool. She peered at her visitor from her almost sightless old eyes, she drew close and held up her ear trumpet persistently in endeavor to catch her words, and she finally caught the girl by the arm and almost screamed into her ear. "Yes, I'll tell you,—I'll tell you,—you're good,—yes, you're good!"

Zizi was fastidious and hated the proximity of the far from attractive old dame, but there was much at stake, and she must use all her tact to win it.

"Tell me all that Conrad, your grandson, told you about that baby," Zizi shouted into the detestable old ear trumpet.

"Hey?" said Granny Green, and Zizi shouted it over again.

"Yes,—yes. It was the awful sleeping sickness. All the children had it,—lots of them died,—poor little things. And Connie, our poor innocent, was in the shop all night, as he always was, and there were many little caskets there. Oh,—how awful for the poor boy—"

Granny Green's emotion got the better of her, and she gave way to rocking back and forth in paroxysms of grief.

"Yes, yes,—too bad," and Zizi patted her shoulder. "Now go on,—what happened?"

"Why, Connie, he heard a little noise, like a faint moan from one of the caskets. You know, the poor boy, he always wants to let out anything or anybody who is caught or imprisoned. So, he opened the casket and sure enough the baby was moving and crying out. Now, you know our Conrad wasn't quite right,—and so he didn't think it was strange, —he only thought to free the little girl. And so he took her out and tried to make her wake up entirely. But she was just drowsy, and then, the poor boy, not having right thought, you know, and having it in his head that that particular casket was to be sent away on the train, he took the baby down to the railroad station and put her on the train. That's all I know about it. He told me the next day and then he forgot all about it, I guess, for he never mentioned it again."

"And didn't you?" Zizi looked at her in horror.

"No; for I didn't think he was telling the truth. You see, we never could tell whether Connie was

telling truth or not. So I thought I'd wait and see if there was any hue and cry after the child. I never heard a word of her from that day to this. So I thought Connie made it all up. But now that you tell me your story, I think maybe that was the Howland baby."

Zizi looked at the old woman in admiration. So weak and frail,—she seemed incapable of the energy she showed in her speech. So deaf, so nearly blind,—she was clear-headed, and fluent of speech. Also her memory seemed unimpaired, and her words bore the ring of truth.

"I think it was," Zizi said, "but we've got to prove it. It could have been some other child, you know."

"Could have been," Granny said, after this speech had been made to penetrate her understanding; "and I don't know of any proof. Connie said she wore a coral necklace,—but all the babies did then. I hear they're out of style now. I'm a great one for style, myself."

And she smoothed down the folds of her old black gown with the air of a lady of fashion.

Zizi stifled her amusement and tried to get more details of the rescued child.

But Granny Green could tell no more. She was positive that Conrad had told her no more. He had found the child was alive, he had liberated her from the casket, he had carried her to the station and put her on a train, and that was all she knew about it,—and even that might have been pure invention on the part of the half-wit.

Yet it was a great deal. Conrad had lately said that he carried the baby Angela down Main Street, Lee Avenue and Carter Street, which was the direct road to the station from Stryker's shop.

The train was a puzzle. A through train, with sleepers on it, would not stop at a tiny village like Normandale in the middle of the night, and it must have been at least near midnight, or Conrad would have been seen.

Then Conrad, his clouded brain working imperfectly, but according to routine, must have reclosed the casket, and the next day it was duly shipped to New Jersey.

Ordinarily the unusual lightness of the casket would have been noticed, but it was easy to believe that in the commotion and haste of the undertaker's rush of business, such a question could be easily overlooked.

At any rate, there was food for reflection, and pretty fair proof of what had happened to the Howland baby.

Yet, Pennington Wise observed, when Zizi told him this story, it did not in any way prove that Ida Holmes Campbell was that child.

"You see, Ziz," he said, "this is a slightly different problem from any I've ever tackled. The identity of that girl has to be proved before the law will let her take her place as Angela Howland. All this baby story may be, probably is, perfectly true, yet we haven't connected it up with Ida Campbell. Nor can I see any way to do so."

"Her teeth—"

"Helpful evidence, but by no means proof. Magee picked the first applicant he could find, who was hazy as to her vital statistics. Had he gone further he might have found several equally good prospects."

"Oh, Lordy! and I thought I had the thing all to rights! By the way, Penny, is Magee the murderer?"

"I never thought so, until I struck that German chemist."

"You believe him?"

"I can't see any reason for him to make up that yarn. It's plausible on the face of it. Magee is a man of nerve, and if he wanted to kill Howland that's just the way he would do it,—go calmly and order those death-dealing bulbs, saying he wanted to kill a dog."

"You seem to know Magee pretty well,—have you ever met him?"

To which question Pennington Wise merely responded, "You ask your mamma and your mamma can ask me."

Which utterly foolish phrase, being interpreted, meant, "I refuse to answer."

At Howlands, Ida Holmes Campbell was preparing to go away.

The opposition was too great, and the girl was breaking down under her weight of unhappiness.

She had no friend with whom to consult. Mary Howland could be of no help. Nurse Lane was

more bitter and insulting than ever. Edith Mills was kind and hateful by turns, being influenced by Swift's attitude toward Ida.

For Swift, too, varied in his treatment of the impostor, as she was now generally called.

Sometimes he would be humble, pleading and gentle, then, when Ida failed to respond, he would turn ugly, threatening and cruel.

"I've had enough of this," he said, at last, savagely; "I offer you everything that heart can wish,—a beautiful home, luxury, happiness, and the kindest husband in the world,—but if you still refuse,—you'll have to go! I don't want you here any longer. So,—oh, Ida, darling,—do—do come to me—" He held out his arms in an appeal that left no doubt of its sincerity.

Ida was touched by the man's earnestness.

"I'm sorry—" she said gently. "I'm truly sorry, Mr. Swift, but I don't—I can't love you."

"Why not? I'm as good as the next man. Are you still hankering after Magee,—a murderer?"

"Stop! You shan't say that when you don't know it!"

"Don't know it! Oh, but I do, and so does Wise, and the police and everybody. It won't be very healthy for Magee should he ever return here, which of course he won't. Now, my lady, do you plan to go—or stay?"

The last word was pleading, yet the man stood aloof, arms folded, awaiting her decision.

"I am going," she said, her little head held high.

"I am going,—because I cannot prove my right here—"

"Because you know you have no right here," he jeered. "Because the plot of you and your partner in crime has fallen through, and he has deserted you, and left you to fight alone, and you are—vanquished! But"—and his taunting tone changed to endearing accents—"my little love, my darling, my beauty, stay with me,—oh, Ida, you *must!*"

He stepped impulsively toward her, but she warded him off with a gesture.

"Don't come near me! I never want to see you again!"

"Then I shall take one more kiss whether you allow it or not," and he sprang toward her, but was interrupted by Edith Mills, who came into the library from the next room.

"No, you won't, Len. Let her alone. Behave yourself, I'm ashamed of you!"

The calm tone was like that of a mother to a naughty child, and Swift looked ashamed as Edith frowned at him.

"Ida," she said, ignoring Swift, "if you really have no use for that man, if you are not vamping him, as I thought you were, then—then, I'm on your side, and maybe I can help you."

"Help me, oh, Edith, I wish you could. I'm so alone and friendless. I want to go away,—will you help me do that,—and arrange about mother—Mrs. Howland?"

"Yes,—come with me, and we'll have a talk."

But the two girls got no further than the hall, for just entering the front door they saw Wise, and another man with him.

And the other man was Austin Magee.

He stepped quickly to Ida and grasped her hand. "How are you, dear?" he whispered.

"Oh, oh," she gasped, "is it you? Why are you here? Don't you know—"

"Don't worry, it's all right. Go back in the library, you two, we're going to hold a little session of those interested."

"What's the matter?" said Swift, as the two girls reëntered the room. "Oh, my God! Magee!"

But it was only for an instant that Swift lost his poise, in another moment he was greeting Magee like a long-lost friend.

Wise entered, followed by Zizi and also Nurse Lane, who had been summoned to attend.

The detective closed the door, and as Leonard Swift began to speak, he said: "If you please, Mr. Swift, we will listen to Mr. Magee's story before we take any further steps."

"By all means," said Swift, with a sneer, "and I dare say it will be some story!"

"It is," agreed Magee, quietly, "and here it is. I left here that night because I had no wish to sign that paper Swift had prepared. It was true in the letter, but it was not really true in spirit. I will explain. The only real proof of Miss Campbell's identity with Angela Howland was a record made by her guardian, Miss Jane Campbell, many years

ago. On her death-bed, at Saint Germain in France, Miss Jane told Ida of this record, and that it was among her belongings.

"But though Miss Ida Campbell examined all the papers, she couldn't find it. I decided to go in search of it myself. And I had to rush to catch the train to New York, and so on to Paris. But neither could I find it. And as a matter of fact, Miss Campbell found it herself after all,—for while I was over there conducting my unsuccessful search, Miss Campbell had a sudden inspiration that it might be a phonograph record! And it was! Miss Jane was fond of making phonograph records as an amusement, sixteen years ago, and she had confided to a record the whole story of her finding the baby on the train. I have the record safely, but I will tell you the purport of its story. It is to the effect that Miss Jane Campbell was on a through train from Boston to New York. While she was in the Pullman dressing-room the train stopped at a village called Normandale. Though a through train, it stopped to let off an eminent physician from Boston, who had been summoned by reason of the epidemic among the children of the vicinity."

"You have the date?" asked Wise.

"Yes, and it is the day after the recorded date of Angela Howland's death. To go on with the story told by the record. When Miss Jane returned from the dressing room to her own berth, she found there a little girl, sleepy but apparently well. Bewildered, but not knowing what else to do, she put the child

to sleep in her berth, and next morning the baby was bright and happy. But, though apparently four or five years old she could not or would not tell her name or that of her parents. When asked questions she would only say Ida Holm or Ida Holmes, which Miss Jane concluded must be her name. But all search,—and her efforts are detailed in her recital, failed, and so she thankfully accepted the child as a gift of God and brought up the baby to the best of her ability, calling her Ida Holmes Campbell."

There was a low moan from Nurse Lane. She was sitting next to Ida and she leaned over and put her arm round the surprised girl.

"This is Angela," she said, in a solemn tone. "I can keep the truth back no longer. This girl is Angela Howland and I know it."

"Hooray!" shouted Magee, his almost boyish enthusiasm breaking out in a cry of triumph. "Good for nurse! I was sure she could tell!"

"Tell us, Lane," Wise said, quickly, lest the woman regret her disclosures before they were made.

"This is how I know," and the strange woman spoke quietly, and with hungry eyes devoured Ida's face. It seemed as if the floodgates of love had been opened at last, as if her barriers of foolish jealousy and doubt had given way, and she took her one time nurseling back to her heart.

"As a baby, Angela often used plurals incorrectly. She would say, 'Let's go for a walks,' not for a

walk. And, whenever she was in a place where she didn't wish to be, she said over and over, 'I do homes!' I've heard her say it a thousand times. When calling, if she didn't like the people, she would only say, 'I do homes!' to all their coaxing or petting. They might offer her cake or candy, she would take none, and just stubbornly repeat, 'I do homes!' She couldn't say *go,*—and said *do* for it. When I heard this, I felt at once it must be our Andy. Yet, it might not have been—other children might have said that. But now, you have the whole story pieced out, I must tell the truth. Oh, my baby, —my lost little Angela."

Nurse Lane, her hard old face transfigured with love, bent over the wondering girl, who nestled in her arms as if really a child again.

"Yes," Wise said, briskly, to hide his own sudden emotion, "the whole story is pieced out, as far as Angela Howland is concerned. Miss Howland, I congratulate you. The record Mr. Magee brought, and some corroborating letters and papers, with Nurse Lane's statements, will prove your identity beyond all question, and you may take your rightful position here as soon as you like."

"I rather think I've something to say about that!" began Leonard Swift. "Also, there's a question or two to be asked of Austin Magee on some other subjects. What about the German chemist?"

"Yes, what about him?" Magee turned on him fiercely. "*What* about him, Leonard Swift?"

"Wait, wait," Wise interrupted. "The question

is about the death of Mr. Howland, and of poor Conrad. Now, I should like to put forth a bit of evidence which may lead to—confession."

From his pocket the detective took a small parcel and unwrapped it to show a glove,—a man's kid glove.

"Ha, a clew!" said Swift, derisively. "A criminal usually drops a handkerchief or half a cuff-link. This time it's a glove, eh?"

"Yes," said Wise, gravely, "this time it's a glove. But the criminal didn't leave it behind him."

"How then do you connect it with the case?" Swift asked, interestedly.

"The connection is clear enough," Wise returned; "the stupidity was mine for not finding it sooner."

"No, Penny, you're never stupid," Zizi said, unwilling to let her idol disparage himself.

"I knew from the bits of glass," Wise continued, "that the murderer had crushed the thin tiny tube under the nose of his victim. I tried to learn if any one had shown a cut finger or thumb later, but could trace nothing of the sort. Yet the breaking glass must have pierced the skin.

"And then it occurred to me that of course such a clever villain would wear gloves. Not, perhaps to save his thumb from a cut, but for the prevention of incriminating finger marks. So, I had the maid get me the gloves of certain members of the household, and on this one," he held it up, "you may see tiny scratches on the thumb and forefinger; merely

slight abrasions of the kid, but indicative, when we remember the broken glass."

In turn, Magee and Swift scrutinized the cuts on the glove, and it was obvious that they must have been made by some such means as the detective had suggested.

Edith Mills' eyes were wide with horror.

"That's Leonard Swift's glove," she cried, as if forced to speak by some power outside herself. "He killed Mr. Howland,—I see it all now! I heard him come downstairs that night, after every one else was in bed, and I heard him come up again."

"And you came down yourself later," Wise said, "and you saw Mr. Howland dead."

"Yes, I did. I came for that red book,—and when I saw—what I did see,—I mean Mr. Howland, I also saw Conrad,—outside the window,—and I ran back upstairs as fast as I could. I thought Conrad killed him."

"No, but Conrad saw the deed, and that's why Conrad, too, had to be put out of the way."

"Going to confess, Swift?" asked Magee, quietly.

"Confess yourself!" Swift turned on him a look of fury. "Helmstadter says you bought the bulbs of him—"

"And you paid Helmstadter well to tell that lie," Wise stated. "That old German knave would do anything for money to pursue his laboratory work, and the price you paid will help him a lot! The game is up, Mr. Swift, have you anything to say, —the police are outside waiting."

"Yes, I have this to say; I did kill Ralph Howland, because this place meant more to me than it ever could to him; the fortune meant more to me than to such a dull, gloomy old duffer. If that girl had kept out of it, all would have been well. I had a right to this place." His eyes were wild now, they gleamed with a maniacal light, and he glared from one to another as he spoke. "I was clever, diabolically clever, and I could have pulled it all off if Wise hadn't come here. Who called you in?" he demanded, glowering at the detective.

"I did," answered Magee. "Before I left for Paris, I went to Mr. Wise and told him about the case and asked his help."

"So you did it, did you," snarled Swift, looking vengeance at Magee. "Well, here's where you get your comeuppance,—all of you!"

And raising his hand above his head he snapped in their faces one of his deadly little tubes of poison gas.

Anticipating this, Wise grabbed Zizi and pulled her to the nearest window, which he flung open. Magee, as quickly, pulled Edith Mills to the open air, and as Nurse Lane and Ida were near the door to the next room, the quick-witted woman clapped her handkerchief to the girl's nose, held her own breath and in an instant they were through the door and Lane slammed it shut.

So the instrument of death killed only the murderer himself, and, though he thus cheated the gallows, no one was regretful for that.

"Saved us all a lot of trouble," said Wise, returning later to find Swift's dead body in the hands of the police.

"Come away, Penny," and Zizi pulled at his sleeve. "We haven't anything more to do with that awful creature."

Nor had Magee, and so he went in search of a brighter moment.

"Where is she?" he asked, seeing Lane in the hall.

"In the sun parlor, sir," nurse replied, smiling at him.

Magee strode through the room only to see Angela going out at the door.

He followed quickly, his arm going round her as he caught up with her.

They walked on toward the orchard and he said, "Forget all the dark spots and remember only our joy."

"I am Angela," she said, turning to face him, and smiling through her tears, "Mother's Angela!"

"You are, my blessing, and you are somebody else's Angela! Whose?"

"You made me Angela," she said, smiling into his eyes, as they paused in the Fairy Ring of the orchard trees, "so I must be yours!"

"You must, indeed. Oh, sweetheart, how I have missed you! What is your spell, you fairy child? I couldn't forget you for the least, littlest moment!"

"Nor I you, my fairy prince. And here in the Fairy Ring, that I really and truly remember from my baby days, here—"

"Here in the Fairy Ring we plight our troth," said Magee, taking her in his arms.

"Where are you, Angela dear," and Mary Howland's soft voice broke in on their happiness.

"Here, mother, come quickly,—I want you to meet my fairy prince!"

"Why, Austin, when did you come back?" and as Mary Howland gave him her hand, it seemed to Magee that she had regained all her poise and naturalness.

And what small part still remained lacking was restored by the quiet and happy days that came to her in the near future.

"I am Angela, mother dear," the girl said, kissing her rapturously. "I *am* Angela!"

"Why, I always knew it, my baby,—that's no news to your mother."

"No,—but it's been proved,—and I am your Angela."

"And mine," said Magee.

"Yes," Angela said, nestling into the hollow of his arm, "yes, beloved, and yours."

THE END

AUG 1 1935

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
00022704284